

BANDWAGON

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FRED D. PFENING III

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OUR FRONT COVER

The daughter of small-time circus performers, May Zinga had the great good fortune to be adopted in 1901 by Marizles Wirth Martin, the sister of Philip and George Wirth, the founders of Australia's famous Wirth Bros. Circus. The youngster, now known as May Martin, was trained as a contortionist and tumbler.

In 1904 Uncle Phil Wirth began tutoring the ten year old in trick riding. She was a natural who worked assiduously to perfect her art. After a year she could do somersaults on her pony's back, and by 1906 she was doing five routines in the family circus. Soon after, John Cooke, of the distinguished English riding family, taught May to do a forward somersault on horseback. She was the only female to ever accomplish this turn, the bareback riding equivalent of the quadruple somersault on the trapeze.

In 1912 May Wirth, as she was known world-wide, came to America to join

the Barnum and Bailey Greatest Show on Earth. She immediately became a star attraction. That season Orrin Davenport, another superb rider on the show, taught her the "back across," a backward somersault from one horse to another. He also showed her the "back-backward" somersault, which began with May standing on a cantering horse's hindquarters, facing its tail. She then did a back somersault with a twist, landing with her face toward the horse's head. By 1913 she was at the pinnacle of her profession, the only woman in the world able to perform three extremely difficult tricks.

Injuries during the 1913 season led her to leave Barnum and Bailey in early July. After convalescing she appeared at London's venerable Olympia during the winter of 1913-1914. In early 1914 she performed in France and Germany, after which she returned to England, working vaudeville dates through April 1915.

The 1915 half-sheet lithograph on

our cover was commissioned for the English vaudeville tour. Drawn by one Jim Allfeck, who fortunately dated his creation, this bill was printed by Alf Cooke Ltd., an English printer best known for manufacturing playing cards. Allfeck took artistic liberties in his characterization of May, softening her features and lightening her hair.

After leaving England she returned home to Australia and the Wirth Bros. Circus. She continued to add tricks to her repertoire. For example, she learned to jump on the back of a moving horse with cumbersome baskets attached to her feet.

In 1919 she married Frank White, a member of the Wirth riding troupe. Because of her celebrity, he took her name and as Frank Wirth he became a successful booking agent and Shrine Circus producer. May performed on Ringling-Barnum and Andrew Downie's Walter L. Main Circus during the 1920s, often doing winter dates in England.

In 1931 she did her last tent troup ing with the St. Leon Bros. Circus in America. Her last public performance occurred at the Springfield, Illinois fair 1937. After retiring she and Frank lived on Long Island and Fort Lauderdale, Florida. After her husband's death in 1965 she moved to Sarasota where she lived until her death in 1978. She was without a doubt the greatest female bareback rider of all time. Original in Pfening Archives.

OUR BACK COVER

This 1907 one-sheet lithograph from Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pioneer Exhibition depicts one of the west's most iconic images—bandits holding up a train. This version by the Courier Company of Buffalo, New York is superior to the Strobridge Lithograph Company's rendering of the same subject. While the two posters share superficial similarities, this representation is less busy, artistically more complex, and tells its story in a more coherent manner than Strobridge's. The detail of the spooked horse in the right foreground is particularly effective in conveying the tension and chaos of the moment. Original in Pfening Archives.

CONVENTION UPDATE

Plans for the June 8-11 Circus Historical Society Convention continue at a breakneck pace. Papers

by David Carlyon on "The Circus Invents Childhood," Debbie Walk on the second phase of the Ringling Museum expansion, Bob Unterreiner on circus band music, Fred Dahlinger on the golden age of the circus, and Matthew Wittman on circus research opportunities in New York City are recent additions to the program. A panel discussion on wild animal exhibitions that includes Ken Kawata, Bob Cline, Bess Frank, and Richard J. Reynolds III is another new feature. Of special interest are Lane Talburt's video tributes to Fred D. Pfening, Jr., and Pete Cristiani, and Chris Berry and John Polacsek's papers on Cincinnati-area lithograph companies.

The auction will be the best in CHS history. Many outstanding items from the collection of the late Fred D. Pfening, Jr. will go on the block. Route books include the composite 1882-1925 Ringling-Barnum book, a treasure trove of information. Among the posters are ones from the pre-combine Barnum and Bailey and Ringling Circuses. Programs are represented by ones from W. C. Coup 1881, Ringling 1896, Forepaugh 1887, Al G. Barnes 1914, Pawnee Bill 1904, and many more. Numerous Great Forepaugh Show couriers and booklets dating from 1880, 1887, 1888, 1890, 1893 and 1894 will be available. Other items in this category are from Sells Bros. 1884, Gollmar Bros. 1908, Batchellor and Doris 1880, P. T. Barnum 1878, and Barnum and London 1886.

The oldest piece in the auction is a twenty page booklet from the Great National Circus in 1864, "under the direction of Mrs. Chas. Warner, formerly Mrs. Dan Rice." Obviously the show was trying to cash in on the Dan Rice name. Dan and Maggie Rice divorced in 1861, and she married the Dan Rice Circus treasurer, Charles Warner. This little book has biographical sketches of all the performers along with a number of reviews of its engagement in Philadelphia the previous winter.

The event will be a bonanza for photograph collectors as hundreds of pictures will be offered. Of particular interest are ones of Robbins Bros. in 1938, Ringling Bros. by 101 Heck, advance cars, William P. Hall's circus

farm, and the John Robinson Circus. A number of panoramic photos taken by the great Edward J. Kelty will also be available.

A group of approximately 30 images from the files of the Strobridge Lithograph Company will be a highlight. These remarkable photos from the 1910s and 1920s were taken to create a record of the posters the firm created for Ringling Bros. and other

include a visit to a ventriloquism museum and the grave of William H. Donaldson, head of the Donaldson Lithograph Company, and founder of *Billboard*.

The Drawbridge Hotel and Convention Center is convention central. Rooms are \$79.00 per night for up to four people, and include a complimentary breakfast. RV parking is also available. Reservations can be made at 1-800-354-9793. Request the special Circus Historical Society rate. Reservations made after May 9 will not receive the discounted rate.

Registration is \$125.00 which includes all events and three meals. Make check payable to Circus Historical Society, Inc. and send to Robert Cline, CHS Secretary-Treasurer, 2707 Zoar Road, Cheraw, South Carolina 29520. If you have questions regarding the convention or would like to make a presentation, contact John Polacsek at 1-313-885-7957 or artistofdetroit@aol.com. A registration form is included in this *Bandwagon*. Those wishing to register online may do so by visiting the CHS website at www.circushistory.org.

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This 1864 booklet for the Great National Circus is one of many rare items to be offered at the upcoming convention's auction.

circuses. Pictures such as these rarely reach the market.

A huge group of typed routes will be knocked down, as will numerous season route sheets including ones from Ringling-Barnum in the 1920s and 1930s. A group of the smaller size *Bandwagon* from 1947 to 1957 is also available.

The centerpiece of the meeting is the field trip to the Cincinnati Art Museum to see The Amazing American Circus Poster, an exhibit of Strobridge Lithograph Company circus posters from 1879 to 1938. Other features

KICKING SAWDUST

A Season with a Mud Show

By Lionel Wright

Lionel Wright was 21 years old when he joined the Mills Bros. Circus in 1956. It turned out to be his only year in the circus business as he was drafted soon after the season ended. After his army service he joined the Bond Parade Floats Company, a Clifton, New Jersey firm that built elaborate parade vehicles, usually for ethnic celebrations such as Puerto Rico Day or St. Patrick's Day. He started at Bond as a float decorator, advancing to head carpenter where he built replicas of the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Taj Majal, among other projects.

Unsurprisingly he found other outlets for his creativity in poetry, photography, and cooking. Many of his poems were inspired by his circus experience. Later in life he became interested in writing prose and authored this article in 2003. He died in 2007. This piece was made available to Bandwagon through the generosity of Harriett Wright, his wife.

It was a rainy evening in the spring of 1956. I was living in a rundown rooming house in Paterson New Jersey and jobless to boot. I walked over to the Passaic falls where a circus had arrived that



Lionel Wright, the author, about the time he was on Mills Bros. Circus. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

morning. The strings of lights on the midway sparkled through the rain, and the huge tents, lit from within, loomed against the darkness. I still see it that way in my dreams.

When I had a sudden impulse to "hire on," the thought took hold of me. "Who's the man I see about a job?" I asked a worker on the midway. He pointed out a tall man in oil skins wearing a sou'wester. The rain was heavier now. "What can you do?" he asked. "I've got a strong back and I can learn anything." (This was a quote from

Around the World in Eighty Days. If it worked for Jean Passepartout, Phileas Fogg's valet, it should work for me. It did.) "You're hired!" When I asked about the pay, he hedged, but finally said fifty a week and "found" (bed and board): not bad for the times. He wanted me to start on the spot, but I had to get my gear. I was back in an hour with a few duds in a tattered suitcase which we stowed in a sleeper wagon.

Since I was a "local," everyone was asking me about the next town. Mount Freedom? I'd never heard of it. I helped tear down the big top, taking my cues from the people around me. It was hard muddy work; wet canvas more than doubles in weight. I collapsed on a bunk that night and we pulled out before dawn; the rain had passed.

All I ever saw of Mount Freedom was a farm house and a barn. By the time we got the big top in the air, I was wrecked. They assigned me to the prop crew whose real work began after the top was up. We unloaded the prop wagon which held everything the performers used in the rings except the animals. Next the dressing tents had to be set. Everyone began yelling "The flag is up!" which (mercifully) meant breakfast was ready. I was a beginner, or "First of May," that date being the traditional opening day of the season. By evening, the thought of having to tear it down and do it all over in the morning was mind numbing.

The first few days became a blur. Whenever I wasn't working, I was in a state of collapse. Each night I consoled myself with the idea of leaving the show come morning. In my sleep I would sit up, arms in the air, pulling on invisible ropes. The others would wake me but it happened over and over. My sleep talk kept them awake, and they pummeled me with shoes. Finally I had to move out of the sleeper. After that I slept under the prop truck. Many workers lived that way as the sleepers were stifling and not free of vermin. Being under the truck kept you from being soaked with dew. Drivers in the morning darkness would rev their engines a few times in case there was someone underneath. I would grab my blanket, roll out, and hop in the cab.

At night on a tear down, we were loading ring curves, but when I tried to hurl mine into the truck my arms wouldn't lift anymore. A boss grabbed the curve off my shoulder and took me aside. He had me sit under a small tree not far away. "Take a break, just stay there," he said. I sat there watching the others hustle, tears streaming down my face. After a while I shambled back into the big top and began loading again.

Now all this time, I had twenty dollars in my pocket, my escape money. I could still take a Greyhound back home.

After tear down, the guys would head for the nearest bar or roadhouse, and one night I followed them. Everyone was surprised to see me, but what surprised them more was when I laid twenty dollars on the bar and said drinks on me. I told the bartender to spend

it all. To myself I said, "Now, you bastard, you've got to do it!" and the bar was suddenly filled with the acrid smell of burning bridges.

Jack, Jake and Harry Mills began their circus in 1939. Jack bought out his brothers' shares and they became employees. Jake was in charge of performing personnel, and Harry took care of concessions (souvenirs, food stands, cotton candy, etc.). For the most part, Jack used them as errand boys. Jack was a powerful figure, a hard, mannerless man, a cross between Wolf Larsen in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*, and Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*, but lacking their erudition. Before the sun rose, we rolled out a sea of canvas for the big top and Jack would shake his fist at the sky, yelling, "GET MAH STINK-IN' SHOW IN THE AIR!" At tear down, he would sit hunched in a director's chair by the power plant, on a moonlit night or in a torrential downpour, always ready to spring into action at the least problem.

Before show time, Jack would sit in his chair under the marquee watching the crowds on the midway. On an afternoon just before the matinee, Baldy, a menagerie worker, was picking up cigarette butts. Jack, enraged, jumped up and gave him some change, yelling, "You're making the whole show look cheap!" Baldy left happily to buy some tailor-mades, and within ten minutes there were a dozen roustabouts picking up cigarette butts, Jack studiously ignoring them.

Jack took out insurance on all the working personnel, and his flunkies came around with policies for us to sign. When I tried to give my mother's name as beneficiary, I was told that Jack Mills had that honor.

"After all, he's paying the premiums, right?" This gave rise to the rumor that Jack was going to poison the cookhouse and retire.

About mid season, Jack dashed out of his trailer in the afternoon waving a sheaf of papers. "You people think you can run the show better than me? Here, take it!" With that he began hurling documents in all directions. His lawyer and his accountant ran along behind him scooping them up. Anitra was reading one when they snatched it out of her hand. Jack charged back into his trailer and slammed the door. His two aids left with the papers and we never did find out what that was all about.

It was my first Sunday on the show and I lined up with the others at the ticket wagon for my pay. When it was my turn, Fats the paymaster said, "Not this week, we have a hold back policy." Okay, not unusual. I'd had jobs like that before. The following Sunday, I was told the hold back was two weeks. This was disconcerting, but when the third Sunday arrived, Fats said not to worry and gave me an envelope which held fourteen dollars and change. I fought my way back to the window yelling, "There's a mistake here!" Fats checked my name in the ledger and agreed. I wasn't supposed to get that much; my new envelope held nine dollars and

sixty three cents.

I'm afraid I made a poor showing the first time I worked with elephants during a show. I was to move the bull tubs (large iron frame stools) to precise locations for each trick. The elephants would circle the ring, trunk to tail, as I rolled a tub alongside them. When I came to the gap between the first and the last, I would take a hard left into the center of the ring, set the tub and slip out.

All the elephants gave me enough room to maneuver except the last one. Bunny swung her hind quarters and blocked my path, so that I had to jump for it as the tub bounced out of the ring.

Later, Red Vigo, the bull man, tore into me as I blurted out my problem. His solution was simplicity itself. "If she does it again, drop the tub and kick her in the shin!" I said I didn't think I could do that, but his deep gravelly voice assured me I not only could do it but I WOULD do it!

Evening performance: Bunny strikes again. I slipped past the tub, and kicked her hard in the left shin; she instantly swung her rear the other way. The red sea had parted and I passed through on dry land.

Bunny never did it again, but for nearly a week she would circle sideways, keeping her hind quarters as far away from me as possible (A little elephant sarcasm.).

The concert is a separate show that follows the main performance. We had a Wild West show, and several times during the regular performance our cowboys and cowgirls would ride in, guns blazing, to advertise the event. Tickets were sold in the stands by the candy butchers (popcorn and cotton candy vendors). Ticket holders stayed seated until the tent emptied out, then those remaining were moved to the grandstand.

Carlos Carreon, an aging Vaquero, was our star. He was a short gnome of a man who had spent his life in the saddle. Three fingers on his right hand were hamstrung, cut by a rope when he was dragged by a wild mustang. He was a splendid roper. In the Texas Skip, he would build a vertical whirling loop and hop back and forth through it. In the Cowboy's Wedding Ring, Carlos and Vicki sat side by side on their horses as he built a loop large enough to enclose both mounts, then lowered it almost to the ground and raised it far above their heads, continuously moving the loop up and down. An incredible strength of arm is needed for this trick. Carlos, Vicki, and "Short Arm Johnny" did trick riding, galloping around the track, scooping up bandanas from the ground and lying back over the horses' hindquarters.

The finale was a skit called "Goodbye Old Paint." The lights were dimmed except for the center ring. Mark Jones, the announcer, would do the narration while Carlos and his horse acted out the story. Carlos would stagger into the ring, now a burning desert, as his



While this image of a Mills Bros. workingmen's sleeper was taken in 1963, it gives an idea of the sleeping arrangements on the show in 1956. Wright talked in his sleep, which led the other men in the trailer to throw their shoes at him. He ended up sleeping under a prop truck. Pfening Archives.

horse stumbled heroically after him. Things went down hill rapidly, and the narration dispelled all hope for a happy ending. The horse, a remarkable ham actor, finally collapsed. The soft western music played by our band was heart rending. Unable to raise the horse, Carlos took out his six shooter, and after an unbearable amount of soul searching he pointed the gun at the stallion. The children in the stands were screaming, "NO! NO!" as Carlos fired. The horse played dead and the children wept and wailed. Suddenly the lights came up, the horse leapt to his feet, nuzzling Carlos, and the band struck up a jolly tune. The children jumped up cheering and Carlos took his applause as the horse nudged him into the spotlight.

During the setup in the morning, Carlos helped pitch the dressing tents. On my first day, he showed me how to tie a stake hitch. Then he showed me again and again and again. The trick seemed to elude me, to his exasperation. I finally learned this essential task, but by then Carlos surely had decided that I wasn't the sharpest thorn on the cactus.

At the point between acts when the Wild West stars galloped in as a "pitch" for the concert, I was standing in the entrance surveying the rings. When the riders raced by, they had to split up around me, which made their entrance chaotic. Carlos warned me about this new flash of stupidity, but at the next show unawareness set in, and there I was again. Carlos was beside himself. The following evening, unbelievably, I forgot again. As Carlos raced by, he dropped a small lariat over my shoulders and suddenly I was flying through the air parallel to the ground. He released the rope and I landed in a cloud of sawdust. I never forgot again.

Carlos had an old-fashioned courtly way of speaking to women, and the bally broads loved it. However, there were people on the lot who referred to him as an "old has been." Carlos had worked in silent films and had broken horses for the Lone Ranger movies.

One bright afternoon, a long yellow custom convertible pulled onto the lot; the radiator ornament was a chrome six gun, and there were silver conchos on the fenders. The top was down, and the driver was Roy Rogers, sporting a white Stetson and his trademark tailored shirt with arrow pockets. You can bet he drew a crowd! His first words were to ask for Carlos. He took Carlos out to lunch and brought him back in time for the evening show. The fact that Carlos called him Roy when they shook hands didn't escape anyone. After that, Carlos was a celebrity on the lot; there was no more talk of "has beens."

We had no shows on Sunday. Till noon it was a day like all others. We set the main poles and laced the canvas, but the peaks of the big top were only hauled up part way (wind-rolled they called it). The menagerie and dressing tents were set and the rest would be finished Monday morning.

Duties done, we lined up at the ticket wagon for our pay and then we were free. Only two meals were served on Sunday which gave the cookhouse staff a break; dinner was served in lieu of lunch. It was chicken every Sunday: a half chicken, potatoes, vegetables, gravy, bread, and coffee. If you were still hungry, you got the other half of the bird with all the trimmings. It was a feast that made supper unnecessary.

Afterwards, the bosses went to "Sunday school," the poker game. They sat on folding chairs and used a bull tub for a card table. They made enough to gamble. We didn't.

The older men sat in the sun sewing canvas; there were always rips to be mended. I asked them to teach me and they put a leather

"palm" on my hand which had a lead slug in the center to push the great curved needle through the canvas. I was the only young one who sewed. The old timers would spin yarns about shows they had worked on in the twenties and thirties. I was as quiet as thread passing through canvas, listening and sewing rhythmically. "Yessir, I remember these rag bags when they weren't rag bags." After a few hours Fats would stop by, collect the needles and give us each a crisp new dollar bill.

Next I would wash a shirt and slacks in a bucket. The shirt dried quickly in the summer sun and the steam would rise from the slacks as they were smoothed out on a hot sloping truck fender. I ran my finger down the edge to make a perfect crease. The towns were suspicious of circus people; best not to look too rowdy. Sometimes we would find hastily lettered signs saying: "NO CIRCUS WORKERS ALLOWED." Getting a later start for town meant my pay would last longer.



Mills Bros. horse trailer in 1956. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

"Bad Eyes," a new kid on the lot, was assigned to my crew. The moniker came from his habit of continually squinting in the sunlight. Some folks called him "Bat Eyes." He was less than keen, a willing, but not very able, worker.

On a Sunday, when I was sewing with the old timers, "Bad Eyes" was washing his coveralls in a bucket. We told him it was unnecessary, as wardrobe maintained our uniforms. Mayme Ward, sitting by her trailer, said to leave him alone as he was setting a good example. A short while later, he complained that the coveralls wouldn't come clean. "Use a little elbow grease," she yelled as she went into her trailer. "Bad Eyes" sat there a minute or so and then asked us where he could get some elbow grease. The old timers looked at each other and one replied thoughtfully, "You might try the mechanics, son." The others agreed that more than likely the mechanics would have a supply.

When "Bad Eyes" returned, he had a can of axle grease, which he dutifully rubbed into the uniform. Mayme came out of her trailer and instantly sized up the situation. She reached back, grabbed a broom and descended on us. WHACK, chairs went over, WHACK, WHACK, men running down the stake line, Mayme right behind them, whacking heads and shoulders, onlookers laughing at the impromptu spectacle.

Working men always rolled their own cigarettes, as regular cigarettes, known as tailor-mades, were too expensive on our pay. I smoked Buglers at ten cents a pack; however, one could get a free pack of tailor-mades for an act above and beyond.

At least once a week, part of the rigging would be fouled, which



The one and only Jack Mills looking typically disheveled. Despite his appearance he had one of the sharpest minds in the circus business. An innovator, he perfected the art of working under the auspices of local civic organizations, in the process making himself quite wealthy. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

meant someone would have to climb up to the main pole on the outside of the big top, lower the rigging, and when it was untangled, hoist it back up and secure it. The big top boss would yell, "Pack of tailor-mades to the first man up!" Before he finished, I was off and running to swing myself up by a side pole rope and make a dash for the top. Walking on the billowing canvas was a bit like taking a constitutional on a trampoline. Sometimes there were two of us on the slope. The first man to the center pole took the honors, the other descended. I rarely lost out at this sport. Once it took them more than half an hour to straighten things out, so I made a rope loop around the bale ring, passed it under my arms and lay on the

canvas: it was warm and sunny and I was asleep in no time.

I suddenly became alert when I felt someone shaking me. They had sent up someone to see what the problem was. After that they teased me: "The only man in history to sleep on top of the big top!" That time I had to share the cigarettes.

The menagerie barker intoned his spiel to the midway crowds: "For-ty tons of EL-E-PHANTS! For-ty tons of EL-E-PHANTS! See the HAP-py FAM-ily of MONK-eys! The BAB-oon. The ON-ly AL-bino LEOP-ard in CAP-tivity. How long has it been since your kiddies have seen a REAL live EL-E-PHANT?"

Our leopard was not an albino. It was just so elderly, its fur had turned white. When it was time to clean his cage, they just pulled him out and let him lie on the grass, blinking in the sunlight, whereas the bears had to be shifted from one cage to another when their wagon was hosed out.

There were times when the barker had too much of the sauce: "For-ty tons of MONK-keys! For-ty tons of MONK-keys!"

It was a hoot to see brother Jake at a dead run for the midway.

American black bears are found in menageries, but are not usually tractable enough to become performers. Russian brown bears are routinely trained for the ring. Formidable in appearance, they stand seven feet tall when erect.

The bear trainer and his daughter would dress them just before they entered the big top. She would kneel down behind a standing bear and dad would give it a shove. When it tumbled over on its back, they would quickly pull on the trousers, then sitting the bear up, they would slip the vest or jacket in place. The bears seemed to find this great fun, and through long practice, their trainers dressed them with a minimum of effort.

The bears had leather muzzles with a very short leash attached. I would mind a dressed bear while the trainer and his daughter dashed off to bring out another one. The first time I had this duty, as the bear and I stood facing each other, he slowly raised his arms to encircle me. I ducked and his arms closed above me. When he put his arms down, I stood up and went through it again, and again. It seemed the trainer was absent an intolerably long time. Then the bear took one step forward, I countered with one step backwards and in this fashion we moved slowly down the stake line, I having no idea how to turn him around. At last in the distance I heard a cry: "Where are you going with my bear?" "Where is he going with me?" I yelled back.

Later on, I learned to move in a small circle with him, which a least kept us in one place and seemed to please the bear who was a great kidder.

Greco did a "four finger stand" on a platform in the center ring using his index and middle fingers. Back in the forties, Unus did a "one finger stand" on the Ringling show, but he wore gloves and a long sleeved jacket to disguise a stiffening device. Greco had no gloves. This was his first time on a "mud show." He had always played nightclubs. I think his agent sold him out. Greco was affable but seemed to think the workers were servants.

In the off hours, he practiced in the ring while I was checking ropes for the evening show. He asked me to buy him a loaf of bread, pointing to a supermarket about a hundred yards away. I could have said no, but it was a small thing. When I asked him for the money, he said: "You go my trailer, you say Koo-la Koo-la, giv me twenty cent for Greco." Too late to say no, I soon found myself standing outside his trailer: "Koo-la Koo-la giv me twenty cent for Greco." A young woman opened the door.

"What the hell does he want twenty cents for?"

"A loaf of bread."

"Jesus, wait'll I get my pocketbook."

On the way back from the market, I got caught in a downpour. Cherry Pie means extra work for the kinkers or performers. All had assigned tasks at the set up and tear down as we were short handed. Excessive amounts of Cherry Pie caused a lot of grumbling, so Jack called a meeting in the big top, saying anyone who didn't like it could leave. Greco jumped up, "I go!" he cried. Twenty minutes later he and Koola drove off the lot.

Some of our trucks had Hollywood mirrors, big wide jobs mounted on the doors. We used these for shaving, along with a little soap to lather up and a bucket of water at our feet. The water wasn't hot of course but adapting is a way of life on a show.

Now I had just rinsed off, gone around to the other side of the truck, and there was a white terry cloth towel lying on the front fender. I hadn't seen a real towel since I hooked up with this rag bag. I was drawn to it. About to dry off, I heard a terrible sound. I spun around and there was Earl, our resident Neanderthal. As he approached, I caught the words: "ARRGG! MY TOWEL!" I could see it in his eyes. My transgression called for the death penalty. My sense of survival was acute. "WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON HERE?" I screamed. I had bought ten seconds of life. "TOMMY TELLS ME I CAN USE HIS TOWEL AND IT'S OVER HERE, NOW YOU'RE TELLING ME IT'S YOUR TOWEL?" I kept it up till he was somewhat mollified, then I stormed off. Brando couldn't have done better.

The twenty-four hour man precedes the show by one day. He would mark out the route with chalk arrows on poles, roads, signs, and buildings, indicating turns and letting us know when we were nearing the lot. His route might not be the quickest, but it would bypass weighing stations, speed traps and other obstacles.

One rainy morning before light, our trucks were peeling off the lot, heading for the next date. As I'd missed the truck I rode with, I flagged down another, the bible back wagon that carried the sections of the grandstand decking folded in three, resembling an old family Bible. I hopped in, realizing too late that "Doggie Joe" was driving. Now Doggie was a nice enough guy, but as he took care of the dogs, he always had fleas. Doggie always wore a long overcoat, even in August. I scrunched against the door making small talk. Doggie never said much.

After a few hours the rain began to wipe out the chalk marks, and we were lost. According to the route card our destination was Indianapolis, so we followed the road signs and by mid morning, our colorfully painted truck was parked in front of the state Capitol building. It takes little to draw a crowd. Soon everyone was asking where the circus was, and we were asking everyone the same thing. Overheard in the crowd: "What happened?" "I'm not sure, I think they lost their circus." "How do you lose a circus?"

When the law arrived, they said they hadn't heard of a circus anywhere, but checking with headquarters, they found we were playing in a corn field west of town. We were given an escort and by the time we pulled on the lot, we had missed most of the morning's work and also breakfast.

Chimpanzees have a reputation for being cute and docile, but our chimps were lethal. Beepo was the largest chimp I ever saw: he was just short of being a great ape. No longer young, he was ill tempered and powerful, with a reddish cast in his eyes and an evil grin that displayed large yellow teeth. There were so many props for this act that I was still setting them out while the trainer and Beepo took their opening applause.

When I stepped into the ring with the seesaw, Beepo turned and came toward me. The trainer, basking in applause, missed out on this little drama. Just before we came face to face, I dropped the seesaw and leaped out of the ring. This happened again and again

until the trainer chewed me out for not setting the props correctly. I hotly suggested that he should keep an eye on his homicidal pal.

After that he held Beepo's hand, but this diminutive Gargantua would still look over his shoulder and flash an unholy grin at me.

The other chimp act had two young ones, the kind that really do look cute. They were dressed in children's clothes which added a touch of innocence.

Between shows they were practicing in the center ring, when a farmer and his preschool granddaughter came in. "MON-KEYS!" she cried, running toward them, arms extended. The chimps galloped down the track to meet her, all of us pursuing. She had such a happy look before they hit her. She was lying face down with one chimp standing on her back and the other one pulling her hair with both hands.

When we got them off, the child was okay, more or less, aside from some bruises and having been traumatized.

Whenever a worker would complain, someone in charge would point to the highway and say, "There's a great wide road out there." There was no argument to that.

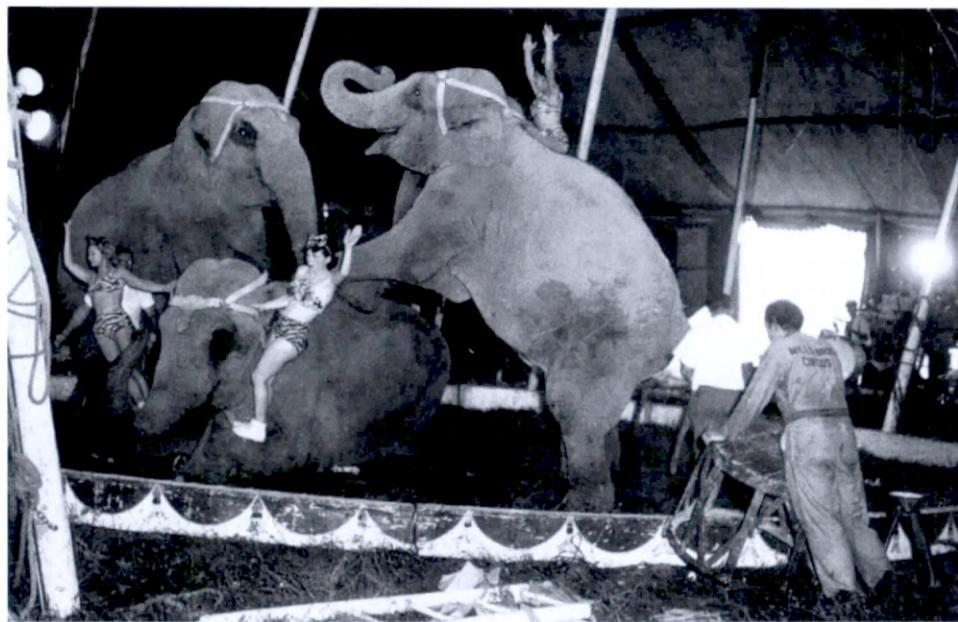
When the English girls decided they wanted better conditions, they drew up a list of grievances and then drew straws to see who would "bell the cat." It fell to Monica. A crowd formed in the distance as she resolutely marched to Jack's trailer, stepped up on the iron stair, and pounded on the door. When Jack opened it, Monica

Mayme Ward, a great trapeze artist in her youth, spent her later years as wardrobe mistress on a number of shows, including Mills Bros. in the early and mid-1950s. She is shown here with La Norma Fox on a Polack Bros. winter date around the time she summered on Mills. Pfening Archives.



began reading from her paper: "We the girls of Mills Brothers Circus, etc., etc., etc. . . ." When Jack realized what this was all about, he literally snarled, back-handed Monica across the face, knocking her to the ground, and slammed the door. There was a terrible silence. The girls rushed over, scooped Monica up, and the crowd dissipated.

Occasionally a "gazooney bird" is hired; this bird is rare but extinct would be better. A gazooney is a guy who's never there when



The author, on right, standing at the ready with a bull tub during the elephant act. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

the chips are down. When the going gets tough the Gazooney disappears. He enjoys "putting things over" on the next guy, but he never lasts long. Watching for chalk arrows that marked our route was a job that fell to everybody in turn. Arrow watchers always fall asleep on the jump, so when the Gazooney nods off, the driver detours a few miles, wakes the Gazoo and tells him to check the intersection to see which road has the arrows. When he hops out, the truck takes off. The Gazooney is stranded, broke, and will probably be busted for vagrancy.

When the top bosses ask what happened to him we say, "Don't know, must've blown the show last night."

Coming into Delaware, Jerry was driving and I was watching for arrows. We were barreling across a long bridge when our brakes burned out; then it was down hill literally. Jerry stood with both feet on the pedal, but it only made more smoke. Like a juggernaut we hurled toward lines of cars at the toll plaza. "Hit something big!" I yelled. Jerry swung the rig out of line and slammed into the back of a truck. We did a bit of damage, but the driver was okay. The police were on the spot and so was Jerry: like many of our drivers, he had no license. A tow truck arrived and we were hustled into a squad car headed "downtown."

While Jerry was being interrogated, I was sitting in the squad room regaling the officers with tales of the big top. They brought me coffee and offered me cigarettes; very civilized I thought. Once Jerry was booked, we were back in a squad car heading for the county jail. I kept telling them there were no charges against me, but no one paid the slightest attention.

After a shower we donned some prison garb and were tossed in a cell. I was trying desperately to get someone to listen and Jerry

couldn't stop laughing. We decided to get some sleep, but that was short-lived. Fats from the show was on the other side of the bars telling us to rise and shine. We were freed, and on the way to the lot he said it cost a bundle to get us out.

Our truck was there when we drove onto the lot, mechanics swarming over it like flies on a honey pot. Jerry and I silently endured the merriment of the prop crew: "What kind of birds don't fly?" But Lord, it was great to get back to the show.

Jack Mills came up to me outside the Big Top, saying: "Did you eat in mah cook house today?"

"Yes sir."

"Didja like what you ate?"

"Yes sir."

"Didja get enough to eat?"

"Yes sir."

"Didja eat like a horse?"

"Well. . . ."

"C'mon, didja?"

"Yes sir!"

"Well by God, you EAT like a horse, you WORK like a horse! MOVE IT! MOVE IT! MOVE IT!"

Jack had been a working man in the bad old days of circuses when food was neither good nor plentiful. Dry sandwiches in waxed paper were passed out to the men for lunch. When Jack started his own show, he made it a priority to serve three hot meals a day. Workers could have all they wanted, but performers had to pay for a second helping. Our food was good. Breakfast was usually eggs, bacon or sausage, home fries, bread, and big steaming pitchers of coffee.

When the cook house was ready to serve, they hoisted a flag to one of their main poles. The first person to see it yelled, "The flag is up!" Everyone repeated the cry, and in a few minutes the entire lot was alerted. Dinner was early to allow the cook house to pack up and head for the next lot. They would be ready and waiting when we arrived the next morning.

Jack was intensely proud of his cook house. He never missed a meal, and the food served at his table was the same as ours. Every time we entered a new state, Jack would invite the governor to lunch. If it was an election year he'd come; otherwise we got a lieutenant governor.

Each crew had its own table, and each man had his place on the long benches. Sitting in someone else's place could get you in real trouble. We had table cloths, restaurant china, and waiters. A few times when the cook house was short handed we were served cafeteria style, which was no hardship.

Once, when we were having liver and onions, a worker went back for thirds and the head cook said it was all gone. Jack grabbed the cook and dragged him over the counter, shouting, "If this happens again, you're fired!"

On a hot summer day in Ohio, Jack stopped a guy who had just hired on that morning, saying: "Did you eat in mah cook house today?"

"Yeah."

"Did you like what you ate?"

"No, I thought it was lousy."

"THAT'S IT! YOU'RE OFF THE LOT! PAY THIS MAN OFF!"

Jack stormed off, still bellowing. When we took our hands away

from our eyes, we were surprised to see the guy still standing. He watched Jack slam into his trailer, and said, "Who's that jerk?"

I've never known anyone who had a shorter career with Mills Brothers Circus.

The outhouses on the lot were called donnikers, six by six tents, perhaps eight feet high. Inside there was a three foot ditch, a low saw horse to sit on, and a stack of old *Billboards*, the show business newspaper, which you tore up for your own needs. In summer the heat in this small enclosure, plus the stench, and the loud buzzing of blue bottle flies, made the facility distinctly unpleasant.

"Donniker Eddie", sometimes called "Eddiker Donnie," not the brightest bulb on the midway, was in full charge of these necessities. One morning everyone had "the runs," the legacy of an uncharacteristically greasy stroganoff the night before. A crowd was following Eddie and his shovel, urging him to set up the damned thing. Eddie, a true artist, was not to be rushed: choosing the spot seemed to be as tricky as dousing. Realizing this would take too long, I vaulted a nearby rail fence into a cornfield, and lo, there in an aisle between the rows was a wooden out house! I dashed to it and sat down on the throne. Sighing with great relief, I leaned back – and the out house fell over. I was still sitting, but I was also flat on my back, the sunlight coming in through the little moon in the door. I remember no more.

Monica rode a horse named Leopard in the spec. I held the bridle till it was time for her entry. While waiting, Lep lifted her front hoof and came down on the tip of my work shoe, narrowly missing my toes. "Look at this," I called to Jerry, who had Patsy's horse. As Jerry turned, Lep moved her hoof onto my foot. I yelled and fell on the ground, as Lep lowered her head to me with a look of total innocence. I thrashed and kicked till she removed her hoof. Had the ground been hard my foot would have been broken.

Later I recalled a remark by a white hunter: "Leopards have black hearts."

The Mills Bros. program for 1956. Pfening Archives.

Official Program

Display	Ring 1	Ring 2	Ring 3
1—The Mills Bros. Circus introduces a gorgeous processional pageant of kaleidoscopic splendor, featuring spangleland and performers from all parts of the world: THE CIRCUS ON PARADE.			
2—The fast fading old west lives again,—Introducing Carlos Carreon, cowboy movie star.			
3—From England The Juggling Bakers		From South America Juggling Drogueutts	
4—Presenting groups of highly educated Shetland ponies Presented by Miss Edith			Presented by Sandor
5—Startling presentation of ladder exploits and novel aerial gymnastics on the track Loop the loop By Miss Bluey	From France The Flying Rudis	Loop the Loop By Miss Kathie	
6—For the little folks, troops of superbly educated doggies Presented by Miss Rita		Presented by Miss Beketow	
7—Here they come! Clowns and more Clowns! They invade the hippodrome track dishing out the latest in buffoonery.			
8—An exhibition of astounding gymnastic and equilibrist balancing From Sweden The four Lindners	Casting Act Victor Gaanon	On the Trampoline The Lorries	
9—Presenting Carlos Carreon, his cowboys, cowgirls, and Indians from his ranch near Hollywood, California.			
10—Twisting and twirling high in the air on the "Cloud Swing" The great Condona	Dainty Pat McMurray	The Amazing Chano	
11—Presenting Count Beketow on his Famous Stallion "Duke"			
12—The Clowns again filling the Hippodrome track, uncorking fun for little folks and oldsters.			
13—From England The Millets Presenting their pyramids and acrobatics	The Seven Hungarians Risley and unsupported ladder	The Renowned Rudis Gladiator juggling	

On a Sunday, in the dead heat of an Ohio summer, our lot seemed out of touch with civilization. Mark Hal Jones, our intrepid English announcer, invited Jerry and me to accompany him to a distant road house. Mark never called us "prop men," it was always "gentlemen of the properties." Whitey, who wasn't too keen, would get puffed up about that.

Having excellent instructions from a local chappie, Mark, Jerry, and I set off on the quest. It was "shanks mare," and after an hour all we'd seen were dirt roads and corn fields. During the second hour we were wondering if we'd been had, when we hit a paved road, and there, shimmering in the August heat, was a gorgeous road house. A mirage? No way! An oasis in the wilderness. It was family owned and we were given a hearty welcome, not always the case in outlying areas. They had a large, square, well appointed mahogany bar, and before long we were quite recovered from the heat and dust.

Mark said it was a great pity that the bar was so far from the lot, this being pay day. After some discussion the owner agreed to send his son and daughter with two station wagons back to the lot, with Mark riding shotgun. They made about three trips. Our guys were piled in like the clowns in the car gag.

The place was lively; mother, father, son and daughter all worked the bar. Late in the evening they ferried us all back to the lot. We were in their debt.

We were ten miles outside of Philadelphia when the transportation boss and a crony drove off in a truck before the evening show. The circus lettering on the sides had been carefully covered with canvas, which meant they had gone to recruit workers.

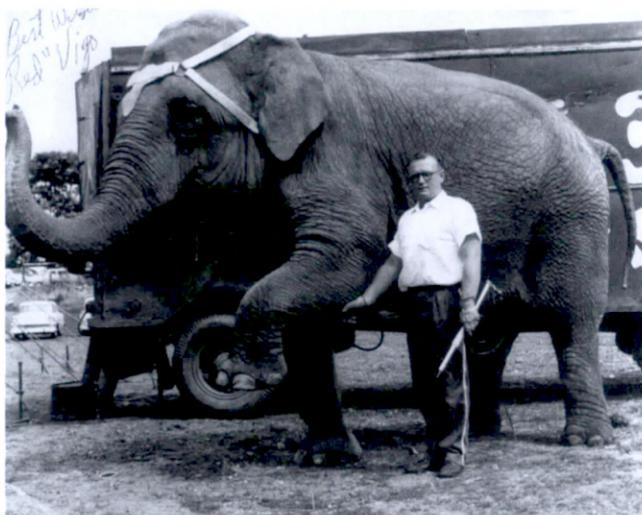
The method was to buy drinks for the relatively able bodied guys on skid row, and once they were under the table, pile them on the truck. The next morning they would stumble out, blinking in the morning light. A few would hit the road, but most stayed till their first payday, three weeks. That was really all you could expect, although one did finish the season with us. Another one told me

Display	Ring 1	Ring 2	Ring 3
14—Hold unto your sides—Here come the funny guys! It's the clowns again!			
15—Mills Bros. Circus presents three groups of Kentucky Thorobreds Count Beketow	Paul Nelson	Jinx Adams	
16—Hand Balancing The Linderman brothers	The man who stands on his forefinger	Hand Balancing on the ladder	The Schmitz trio
17—Once again Mills Bros. presents a bit of the Old West			
18—From old Mexico, daringly different on the triple traps The Renois			
19—A Parisian presentation. Around the hippodrome track, the French darlings of the Air performing high up above your heads on the slender web.			
20—The most Daring and Sensational ten horse hitch ever seen on the Hippodrome Track. Ridden by the Fearless Jinx Adams			
21—The Battle of the Century by the Funny Fellows			
22—From Mexico Barrel Kicking Miss Rebecca	On the Slack Wire The Amazing Victor	Contortionist Supreme The Amazing Leahy	
23—The Parade of the Clowns, in which the Hippodrome Track is Surrounded by Tomfoolery.			
24—Mills Bros. Circus Presents the Greatest Group of Feminine Riders in the History of the Circus. The Misses Graham, Moran, Trudy, Travers, Sheilaugh, Patricia, Eletra, Patsy, Monica, Kathie, Beketow, and Christine.			
25—Presenting Mills Bros. High Jumping Horses			
26—The Sensational and Renowned Namedils on the High Perch			
27—Balancing Traps The Wonderous Renois	Balancing Traps The Astounding Victor	Balancing Traps The Astounding Victor	
28—Mills Bros. Circus Presents their Ponderous Herd of Elephants Trained and Presented by Captain Virgil Sagraves			
Acts listed and the continuity of same, subject to change without notice.			

he had been shanghaied before, by a different show. We were not alone in our recruiting techniques.

We had a number of specialized workers, like the tire man whose job was to check, change, and patch tires. Our rolling stock was about seventy vehicles, more than enough to keep him hopping.

The electrician was responsible for our two great generators, which completely filled an open trailer truck. Cables snaked across the lot every which way: to the menagerie, the midway, big top,



Elephant handler Red Virgo gave the author tips on how to interact with his charges. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

concessions, dressing and tents. Even the prop wagon had to be lit. Once when the generators broke down we lowered the side walls and illuminated the show with truck head lights. No aerial acts worked that night.

Doc, our carpenter, repaired props, built storage boxes, adapted truck interiors, and made poles.

The blacksmith handled all the iron repairs and saw to it that the horses' hooves were clean and well shod.

Our mechanics traveled in a gaily painted, dilapidated bus. Trucks were always breaking down on the road, and they fixed the engines with "scotch tape and chewing gum." On one jump, after fifteen minutes of furtive work, they closed our hood and said we'd be okay for about ten miles. A while later, when we conked out, they fixed us again. On another jump before daylight, the mechanics' bus was hit by a train and dragged a ways down the track. No one was killed or badly injured, but there were arms in slings and the odd crutch was carried. They were in the same shape as our trucks: walking wounded.

It was about eleven thirty when we piled into a roadhouse. The bad news was that in Pennsylvania they closed at midnight. At the witching hour, when the place was due to turn into a pumpkin, we protested. The bartender refused to serve us, and we refused to leave.

He threatened to call the police, but when he came out from behind the bar, he found four roustabouts lounging in front of the phone booth. He made a dash for the door, but that too was blocked. Frantic, he dived behind the bar. No one had moved, and the silence was ominous.

One of the older men pointed out that since the bartender was going to be there as long as we were, he might as well make some money, as everyone was eager to spend. He presented the case so reasonably that the bartender began serving again. The situation

was diffused, and all of us relaxed. We left an hour later.

Circuses use female Indian elephants in the ring. Males are unpredictable, and Africans don't take direction. In lot lingo elephants are always referred to as bulls.

In the morning the elephants were tethered in a line by the bull wagon. When one of them was taken off to work, the others belled in a loud chorus. This kept up till she was out of sight. This occurred every morning, and when I asked about the way of it, I was told that they were saying farewell, as they had no idea they would ever see their companion again. I could never accept that view: elephants are extremely smart and really do have good memories.

Jenny was blind in one eye. They said years back she'd had a fight with a young tusker on the Ringling show. I never knew if there was any truth in that, but you had to remember never to walk on her blind side. Pop Corn Charlie made that mistake. When she came down on his ankle he let out a scream and fell on the grass. The bull man tried to hasten Jenny out of the way, but she was too upset to mind him. She rushed back to Charlie, who began screaming again when he saw her coming. Jenny only wanted to help. She was so nervous she couldn't work the rest of the morning. Popcorn Charlie gimped around on a crutch for a while, but he never held it against Jenny.

Elephants walk carefully around people. That business of elephants being afraid of mice is near the mark. Actually, any small animal running underneath them is enough to cause panic. They can't see it and they seem to have a fear of stepping on any living thing. A town boy's Chihuahua ran under them and they all freaked out. We got the boy and his dog off the lot, but it was a while before the bulls calmed down.

Burma, our largest elephant, was the official Republican Party elephant. In 1952 our wardrobe mistress designed and stitched a beautiful set of trappings for her to wear in Ike's inaugural parade.

Between shows the elephants were staked in a line that was roped off to keep town folk from crowding in too close. The kids bought peanuts for them from a nearby concession. One brat kept offering peanuts to Burma, then pulling them back quickly to tease her. A bull man down at the end yelled, "Stop that kid!" But before anyone could move, Burma reached over the rope, raised him up, and hurled him through the air. He landed about fifteen feet away, sprang to his feet, and ran. He was lucky. Word was, many years ago on another show Burma killed a man. When the sheriff came to put her down, the owner substituted a less valuable elephant, since townies can't tell the difference. In her new incarnation she became Burma.

Leila Bardi was thin, as elephants go. She was quiet and not at all gregarious like Jenny and Burma. She had been purchased from a German circus and came with a full set of instructions. Leila only understood commands in German, which our bull men dutifully memorized. Elephants can be quite dexterous using the flap on the end of their trunk, called the finger. Leila pulled out the shackle pin on her leg iron and wandered off to graze. When they brought her back, the pin, which Leila dropped on the ground, was returned to the shackle. The next time she wandered off, they couldn't find the pin. When she wouldn't take water that evening they found the pin in her mouth. She didn't know what hiding place would be safe.

One Sunday night, Jerry and Tommy and I paid a farmer for a lift back to the lot. We also bought a bushel of carrots for the bulls. Elephants sleep laying down on their sides, and we were stumbling among them in the darkness waving bunches of carrots. When the elephants woke up we scrambled, trying not to get stepped on, while they happily munched the carrots. Fortunately, no human

was harmed during the production of "The Menagerie Midnight Snack."

When I had a little free time in the day, I visited with Jenny. She would grab my wrist with her trunk and swing side to side till I had to take three steps in each direction. "C'mon Jenny, Jenny leggo!" She lifted me straight off the ground and let me dangle while she looked me over with her good eye. "Jen, I gotta get back to work!" In her own time, she'd release me. We both enjoyed the game.

If you became too ill to work, after a couple of days they would leave you with a doctor or at a hospital. The show would cover the bill, but it wasn't likely you would ever catch up with the circus. The policy was not to carry any deadwood.

"Short Arm Johnny," a trick rider (so called because of a withered arm) was too sick to ride and was due to be dropped off the next morning. That night we sat up with him while he wept, knowing he would never get back to us that season.

When I started running a fever and alternatively had the chills, I was scared silly. The next day I got through the matinee, and collapsed in the empty prop truck, where I slept fitfully all afternoon. I never made a move for lunch or dinner, and the fever was getting worse. Half an hour before the evening show, performers sat on folding chairs lined up in front of the tailgate of the prop truck. I heard my friend Jeff, the dwarf clown, say, "The poor beggar must be sick." When the band struck up the opening number, "Lady of Spain," I knew I wasn't where I should be. I got to my feet, ran to the tailgate, leaped over the performers, hit the ground running, and arrived at the center ring the very moment I should have. Fats gave me a nod and a grin and after that I was too busy to notice anything. I was slightly delirious. Looking up, I had difficulty telling the aerialists from their shadows on the canvas. Everything seemed strangely dream-like, but I worked the show and the tear down. The next day I felt a little better, and the day after I was definitely on the mend. The pressure was off: I was still with the show.

In the nineteenth century, circuses used tanbark as a ground cover. This was the bark of oak or hemlock broken or bruised in the mill; it was used in the tanning of leather.

We of course used sawdust, but only on important dates; rural dates were simply played on grass. After the completion of the work inside the big top, trucks of sawdust were brought in. Dozens of us filled buckets and walked about, scattering an even layer. The sawdust wasn't all that fine; it had a lot of wood shavings mixed into it. When we were finished, the light colored sawdust reflected the overhead lights, and had that magical pristine look of newly fallen snow. Later, after the horses had galloped through, and the elephants had flattened the shavings, it would lose some of its allure.

There's an old saying on the circus: "Once you get sawdust in your shoes, you never get it out."

John Lewis, our canvas boss, was a big black man with a deep rumbling laugh. Word was, he was one of the top three canvas bosses in the country. His knowledge and expertise allowed us to set the big top in the worst of weather. Setting up on a mild sunny morning is routine, but a "firefly layout" (before dawn) in high winds changes the sequence. Once we had to drop one whole side and raise the other side to accommodate a shift in wind. John was a strong man who made instant decisions and always prevailed. He had spent his life on circuses and was the highest paid man on the show. Not even a performer made half of what John pulled down in a week.

I never saw him angry. He seemed to find humor in all things. After the setup, John could always be found sitting by the stake and chain wagon (the traditional hangout for big top men). I liked to visit the "long side" when John would smoke his pipe and spin yarns of seasons long past.



Mills Bros. ticket wagon in 1956. Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

Once he came up behind me and put his massive hands on my shoulders, saying, "I wish I had this boy on my crew in the old days, coming out of Baraboo." John could make you feel like hot property. Baraboo, Wisconsin is where the Ringling show was born.

I had little to do with ring stock, except for leading horses into the big top, but on occasion I was drafted into service with the blacksmith. My job was to hold the horse's hoof while a new shoe was attached. The leg would be bent in a crook and I would brace it against my thigh, as we had no sling. I did my best to pull the leg sideways to keep the horse off balance, and the horse did his utmost to sidle towards me in order to kick. The smith had a hard time driving the nails, and we would end up a ways from where we began. We only did one horse on any given day. It was an exhausting venture.

All of our poles were made from trees; aluminum poles wouldn't come along for another five years. The side poles were made from saplings and painted with white enamel. They weren't always straight and some had knobs where the branches had been cut away. Quarter poles were much longer and thicker. They were also white, but the top four feet were painted red or blue, red poles being the shortest. The quarter poles were intermediate poles, positioned on either side of the track; red near the stands, and blue close to the rings. The steel pin on top of the pole, called the horn, went through a hole in the canvas. The hole was reinforced with a large circle of leather called a target, which had a rope dangling on either side of the aperture.

When the peaks of the big top were raised part way, we slipped under the canvas to the center area. The heat was suffocating, and the smell of trampled grass overpowering. The targets were about eight feet in the air, and the pole catcher chanted his orders:

"AL-right GENTLE-men, BRING me a BLUE pole! SWING THE WHITE END AROUND! RAISE IT UP! RAISE IT UP! SHOOT IT!"

About six of us raised the pole at an angle, aiming the horn at the center of the target, while the pole catcher maneuvered the hole by pulling the ropes. When he saw that they lined up, he yelled,

"SHOOT IT!" and we thrust the pole in place. The catcher quickly wrapped the ropes around the pole in an intricate tie off as we readied ourselves for the next pole. Eighteen red poles and twenty-four blue poles were a workout to be sure.

When all the poles were tied off, an elephant raised the peaks of the big top, causing the butt ends of the quarter poles to drag along the ground as the canvas rose. An elephant was brought inside to push the quarter poles in place. Jenny, her head down, pushed on the lower part of the pole, causing the butt to plow a furrow in the ground. When the poles were in position, they were solidly anchored in the earth and sky.

Once the big top was up, the bleachers and grandstand were set, and the rings and props were put in place. Next, the side walls were hung on the side poles. These canvas sections overlapped each other by six feet, and it was possible to slip into the big top through the side walls, but it was never done, as it brought bad luck to the show. If you were on the long side of the big top where there were no entrances, you had to walk all the way around to the short side, and use the back door, which was the performers' entrance. Anyone who caught you taking a short cut would chew you out, as you were bringing bad luck down on everyone.

The next thing was to guy out the top by tightening two ropes on each side pole to stakes in the ground. The canvas boss adjusted the hitch on the stakes as the crew tugged the ropes taut. The boss chanted so the crew could pull in unison. "HEAV-y, HIT IT hard, PULL the slack, WAY back, PULL it down, TO the ground. . . . WALK ALONG!"

There were one hundred and thirty-two ropes to tighten, and it all had to be done again before the evening show, as the ropes would have slacked some.

The main poles, which numbered four, were over fifty feet in length. We had just raised the last of them one morning when it broke off near the base, and plunged toward the ground. The rule was if you were within its reach never turn your back. If you watch which way it falls you can easily avoid it. Whitey, forgetting, turned and ran straight on a line with the falling pole. Everyone was screaming as Whitey ran like a bat. The pole slammed down, its tip just two feet behind him. He had actually outrun a falling main pole!

We had to set a three pole big top, crowding the acts into two rings. By afternoon the circus had purchased a log, and we set about making a new pole. We got the thing up on stout sawhorses, and about four of us stripped off the bark with draw knives. Doc, the carpenter, drilled the holes for the pole pins with a brace and bit, while the blacksmith set iron collars around the top and bottom of the pole. The hole was drilled for the mud block and the horn was set in the top. Circuses in the nineteenth century would have used

Mills Bros. big top on May 17, 1956 in Athens, Ohio. The author once fell asleep on top of the tent. Baker Young photo, Pfening Archives.



the same methods.

We were in Muncie, Indiana when a buckskin mare named June had a foal. The newspapers were alerted that the foal would be named after the town, which brought the mayor and other dignitaries to the lot. Flash bulbs popped, and Jack was all smiles about the free publicity. The next day we set up in Peru and informed the press about the birth. A replay: same colt, new name, new mayor, same old Jack grinning at the cameras. Talk about a running gag, they kept this up until it was obvious that the colt was no longer new born. I don't recall the final name, but it was a town in Illinois.

The governor of Illinois accepted Jack's invitation to lunch followed by a cook's tour. He commented on June and her foal in a roped enclosure. Jack, eager to show off the colt, stepped over the rope, and June chomped him in the shoulder. Aside from the flesh wound, she had ruined a pricey tweed overcoat. Jack slapped her, roaring, "I WANT THIS HORSE SHOT!" Paul Nelson, the equestrian director, made it clear that if June were put down, he was off the lot. It all came to nothing. June was saved, and a few weeks later the colt was sold to a farmer.

Sunday in Kokomo I walked to town in the late afternoon, drifted about aimlessly, and headed back to the lot in the early evening. I bought a bag of pretzels in a shop that baked them in brick ovens, and a jug of rich milk from a dairy store.

The lot was quiet, as most of our people were in town. I climbed up in the canvas wagon, which was an open truck, and sat leaning against the front wall. The milk was cool and wonderful and the pretzels a royal treat. Above me a whole sky of Indiana stars dazzled brightly and the only sound was a chorus of crickets. I have never forgotten the contentment that came over me. On that evening, truly all was right with the world.

Burma and Jenny were both fond of Bunny. Female elephants often bond. At seventeen, Bunny was only an adolescent, while Burma and Jenny were in their prime. Staked between them in the menagerie tent, Bunny received gifts of extra hay pushed to her from both sides. They doted on her, and Bunny just ate the hay.

In the afternoon when the midway was crowded, a fight broke out in the tent between Jenny and Burma. Shrill trumpeting caused the idiot barker to spiel, "SEE THE ELEPHANTS IN ACTION!" People flocked to the entrance as Burma pulled up her stake and crashed through the side wall, side poles flying. She stormed down the midway, high stepping and shrieking, her great head swinging from side to side. People ran every which way, grabbed their kids and vanished. It was reminiscent of King Kong's reception in the native village. Red Vigo, who had been having coffee at the grease wagon, dashed toward Burma, but in her rage she didn't know him. He was nearly trampled. Red swung his bull hook into the lower part of her ear flap and pulled down sharply. It split, spattering blood over his white shirt. Burma stopped dead and he was able to lead her away easily.

Bunny was placed on the far side of Leila Bardi, who had never shown the slightest interest in her. For Bunny, the honeymoon was over.

The menagerie top, cookhouse, dressing tents, and donnikers were all set using steel stakes. The stakes were about three feet in length, an inch and a half in diameter, and the head was three and a half inches across. They were carried on the stake and chain wagon along with the bale rings, ham-

mers, and wooden stakes for the big top.

We used sixteen pound sledge hammers to drive them. Rocky ground, frozen ground, asphalt parking lots, nothing stopped them. The hammer was swung in a three hundred and sixty degree circle, not stopping until the stake was down. When the hammer hits the stake, it slides off, and its momentum takes it around and back up again. Its weight brings it back down. Once you get the rhythm of it, it's just a matter of aiming. If the handle hit the stake, the head flew off and you got one hell of a tongue lashing. Stripped to the waist, we whomped them down; we also drove them one-handed, but that was show-off stuff to impress the town girls.

The big top stakes were wooden, two and a half to three inches in diameter, averaging about four feet in length. They were put down by the stake driver, a small power-operated pile driver mounted on the side of the stake and chain wagon. The stakes had iron collars on them to prevent them from splitting. Every now and then the stake driver would break down and we would have to drive the 120 big top stakes by hand. Three men on a stake alternated their swings just like in the old days. If someone's timing was off just a fraction, the hammers collided, painful tremors ran up the arms, and the morning air filled with colorful language.

We had another show-off trick that was popular, touching your nose with a hammer. Holding the hammer handle upright in one hand and keeping the arm outstretched and rigid, you lowered the head until it touched your nose and then raised it back up. New guys were always trying this because we made it look easy. They had to avert their heads quickly as the hammer fell over their shoulders. It was that or a broken nose. You had to drive a surfeit of stakes before you could handle that parlor trick.

Sunday in a dry county was depressing and when town was not in reach, the doldrums set in. We had been on the lot all day and evening held no promise. Then the word was passed that the cooks were making "hooch." At the cookhouse they were stirring up a big pot and adding appropriate donations. One man had some whiskey; another brought an almost full bottle of rose wine; other odds and ends were added. The base for this beverage was sterno, of which the cooks had an abundant supply.

About sundown the batch was ready and we ladled it into mugs. It was an odd flavor, but not unpleasant. We sat around sipping, chatting, and of course yarn-spinning, under the rising moon. By the time we turned in, everyone was a bit lightheaded, but the only problem came in the morning. We were ravenous. We could have devoured a string of horses before breakfast.

Someone said the "hooch" dehydrates your system, causing the hunger. Perhaps that's true. I do know I've never tasted its like before or since.

Louie, my boss in the prop department, was an easygoing guy from Memphis with a fair sense of humor. In his thirties, he was a four year veteran of the circus. We got on well and often went to town together.

Louie's pride was his pink suit, not a circus costume, a woolen dress suit. It was a very light pink and distinctly fuzzy. He always wore a dress shirt and tie when he went to town on Sunday.

In the winter, Louie had a job driving stolen cars from one state to another. All he did was deliver them at so much a vehicle. The ring had been broken and all concerned were being rounded up. The feds busted Louie on the lot. As they were taking him away in handcuffs, he shouted, "Reno, I'll be back, take care of my pink suit." I assured him I'd do just that. Fats said the show would try to get him paroled in their custody. They had done that with a number of men. I wrote parole letters every week for different guys. There had been a worker who charged to write letters, but I put him out of



Three of the female participants in the wild west concert.
Photo courtesy of Harriett Wright.

business writing free.

Louie's abrupt departure left a vacuum. There was no way he could return that season and we needed a prop boss. Whitey had been on the show three years, and was a helluva worker, but he was retarded. Allentown Paul talked to himself, Jerry was a hot head who resisted authority, and Tommy was too new and a bit wild at that. And so it came to pass that I was the new prop boss. I would have a two week trial period during which Fats would hover over me. I was a bit nervous, but very pleased. I missed Louie, but it's an ill wind that blows no one good. On the first day I skipped lunch and spent the time checking out every rope and cable for the aerial acts. At the foot of each main pole are piles of rope that had to be coiled neatly so as not to entangled someone.

I no longer wore coveralls; I wore red pants and a white silky shirt with bloused sleeves, so that I could be spotted across the arena if trouble arose. After two weeks, nothing was said, but it was evident that Fats was no longer bird-dogging me. I was secure in my position and, in truth, reveling in it.

A lot of folks had nicknames on the show. There were several ways they came by them: an association with their job—Doggie Joe, Donnike Eddie; physical characteristics—Fats, Baldy or just the simple shortening of a name. Sometimes the town in which one was hired would serve—Allentown Paul to distinguish him from other Pauls.

My nickname was Reno, which was a corruption of Lionel. The crew had trouble with my name, and it went fairly rapidly from Lino to Leno and ultimately Reno.

I had hired on, an out of shape, not very competent Lionel, and had become a strong confidant prop boss named Reno. The transformation was exhilarating.

My pal Jerry had a short fuse and an uncontrollable temper. His rage would erupt without warning. On the morning set up in the big top, Jerry was fastening the ring curves together with steel pins. When I asked him to do something or other, he swung the pins at my face. As I leaped clear, he said he was going to find a stake and I had better do the same. Now a stake fight is a bad business. No one walks away unscathed. I saw a big top man lose all his teeth from a stake blow that split the corners of his mouth. I raced after Jerry, tapped him on the shoulder, and sucker punched him. Better to get it started before stakes were involved. He recovered, swung at me, we clinched, and I tripped him. We had a crowd around us. They don't break up fights on the circus. I had to win or no one in my crew would take orders from me again; Jerry had nothing to lose. Over and over we rolled; he was on top pummeling me when I heard Baker the clown yell, "Kill him, Jerry!" Baker? I'd never

done anything to him; I made a mental note. I flipped Jerry over, slammed him hard and fast, and he caved in.

"Okay," I said, "Let's get back to work." Jerry never held a grudge, and by the time matinee was over we were buddies once more.

Reynoso, from Mexico City, did an Iron Jaw act, which meant he hung by his teeth from the top of the big top. He clamped down on a leather "tongue" attached to a drop line, gave a signal, and we hauled him all the way up. Actually the teeth had little to do with the success of the trick. It was the jaws locking on the leather tab that made it possible. Reynoso's wife and young brother-in-law Jesse were also adept at this feat.

Jesse did a separate act on a "Cloud Swing" which is simply a loop of webbing, canvas covered rope. He would sit swinging, drop and dangle by his armpits, hang by his knees, and with the aid of small loops, hurl himself outward and hang by his ankles.

The finale for the trio's act was a triple iron jaw, all three going up simultaneously. When the prop crew was short handed, we couldn't raise them more than six feet. The crowd was not impressed, and Reynoso was furious. I solved the problem one evening by appealing to the audience for help. In a flash six young guys poured out of the stands and pulled with us. The Reynoso Trio shot to the top



Paul Nelson was the Equestrian Director on Mills in the 1950s and early 1960s. This photo was taken around 1961. Pfening Archives.

of the big top, the crowd was impressed. Reynoso was pleased and the volunteers thought it a great lark. From that time forth, I had a steady supply of young bloods.

At the end of the season, Reynoso wanted me to return to Mexico with them and spend the winter training for the cloud swing. I thanked him but remembered Jesse's talk of bleeding armpits till he toughened up. Besides, I couldn't visualize myself up there without a net.

The familiar ringmaster with red jacket and top hat, is a European concept. Ringling liked the idea and borrowed it for his show, but most American circuses had an Equestrian Director. An

announcer introduces the acts, and the Equestrian Director paced the show with his silver whistle, stepping in whenever trouble occurred. Equestrian acts aside, he directed the entire show.

Paul Nelson, our Equestrian Director, was the third generation of a world famous circus family, the Flying Nelsons. Paul's forte was horses. In the off season, he raised them in Kentucky. He did a liberty act, the horses ran free—at liberty, with a string of sorrels in the center ring. He would cue them with hand signals and they would trot in circles, change direction, pair up or walk on their hind legs. Paul was in his early forties and his authority was second only to Jack Mills. He had a wooden leg, the legacy of a hunting accident, but it never seemed to handicap him.

One night a cable snapped on the balancing trapeze, throwing the rig askew and the woman working high above the ring froze. Paul grabbed the climb rope and swung it to her saying, "Come on down, lady," but she was ashen and had a death grip on the trap. "Well then, I'll come up and get you. Paul pulled himself up the rope keeping his legs parallel to the ground in the best gymnastic tradition. When he reached the top he slapped her on the bun and traded places with her. She descended and Paul played to the crowd until we secured the trap.

On an afternoon in Peoria Illinois, Paul, having business that took him off the lot, made arrangements for Fats to direct and for Earl, a senior groom, to handle the liberty act. Mayme Ward, the Wardrobe Mistress, found a costume that almost fit him. Earl looked like a Neanderthal decked out for a high school production of the *Student Prince*. We led the horses to the ring and they circled once before they realized this wasn't Paul. The leader stepped over the ring curb and the others followed at a steady trot right out the back door, leaving Earl in the spotlight, screaming and growling. The audience loved it. Our clowns never caused that much laughter. The horses eluded us and ran across the fields. Between shows, we searched the countryside and by evening we had all but one. In the morning we left two men for a final search. They arrived on the new lot before the matinee. The horse had been found in a farmer's barn. Paul found the whole affair hilarious.

The bally broads, in English riding habits, did the Horse Management act which ended with the high jumps. I was by the center ring as the girls galloped down the track. Kathy's horse balked, throwing her over the rails as I started running. As the next horse took the jump, Kathy managed to roll clear before it landed. A hand grabbed my arm and Paul Nelson said: "Where are you going?" Breathless I blurted out: "Kathy, she . . ." "Are you a Doctor?" "No sir." "Then get back to your ring!"

I had cut my hand on the frayed metal covering of a ring curb, making a three inch gash in the fleshy part of my palm. Later Paul spoke sharply to me because I was having difficulty pulling a guy rope taut. I showed him my hand and he asked if anyone had seen it. "Yeah, they told me to rub some dirt in it and forget about it." "My God!" he said, and took me to his trailer. He had a gorgeous Air Stream that looked like a silver rocket ship. Inside it was spotless and gleaming; light and airy, with a black and white cowhide throw rug on the polished floor.

Paul cleaned, disinfected and bandaged my hand deftly. I may not have been a doctor, but he was a pretty good one.

Bally broads are the show girls who perform the Aerial Ballet. Bally is a corruption of ballet. Our girls were all from England, here on work visas and when the season ended it was back to the Sceptered Isle. They also did ladder acts, acrobatic routines on small ladders hung high between the quarter poles, "Horse Management," the Elephant act, and the spec parades. Vicki did trick riding, and little Anita was carried about the ring with her head

in an elephant's mouth. They had endless costume changes from jungle queens to Spanish ladies to cow girls, and of course they had to help set up and tear down the big top.

We teased Anitra by telling her that elephant saliva shrinks the ears. Talking to her, I would tilt my head both ways and her hands would fly to her ears. "What are you looking at?" "Nothing, nothing at all." When she left, you knew she was heading for a mirror.

When I became Prop Boss, suddenly the bally broads were overly friendly. They asked me to hang their rigs lower so they wouldn't have to climb so high; I was surrounded by "pretty-please" smiles.

Paul Nelson, aware of their campaign, told me, "If the show wanted them to work on the ground, it would pay them to work on the ground, but as it stands, they are being paid to work in the air." I quoted Paul to the girls and for a while, they were a bit frosty. It all settled out. They were no worse off than before, whereas Nelson would have crucified me if I had given in.

During an evening performance we were struck by a ferocious Midwestern thunderstorm. High winds swept into the big top. The canvas pulsed and billowed, lifting the quarter poles off the ground. As the wind shifted, they slammed down, but not where they had been. Since a blow down seemed imminent, our first job was to clear the tent without panic. Everyone on the show helped guide the folks out without injury. Some of the quarter poles had jumped into the stands, splintering the bleachers. The poles were still tied off to the canvas and the butt of one pole, about four feet off the ground, spun in a wide circle. We tried to secure it but it knocked us down like ten pins. John Lewis gave the order to drop the top, "before it blows into the next county!" Down she came, billowing and thrashing. A few quarter poles made odd tilted peaks. Everything was under the canvas, props, aerial rigs, bleachers and rings. It was total chaos.

We stood in the rain and the darkness surveying the mess. The canvas had to be unlaced by climbing over the debris, then the sections had to be dragged and lifted off in order to get at the paraphernalia of the show. We worked through the night loading trucks and rolling canvas. At dawn we made the jump to our next town and set up again.

The Baron was a horse trainer from Germany who wore riding britches and tall leather boots, carried a riding crop and sported a monocle. He was the quintessential Prussian, and a nasty bit of work. It was easy to envision him directing silent films.

He had a son about seven or eight years old, who fortunately was not a chip off the old blockhead. Tommy found a new baseball glove on the lot and gave it to the boy. He ran off delighted but returned tearfully in short order as the Baron had ordered him to return it because "Those men have bugs." Nor was he allowed to talk to us anymore.

The next day we were unloading the performers' trunks to be placed in the dressing tents. The costumes and makeup are carefully packed and the trunks must be carried level at all times. When we came to the Baron's, we flipped it off the tailgate, upside down it went. He began screaming as we rolled it end over end into the tent and managed to set it wrong way round. We serenely ignored him as he came close to an attack of apoplexy.

He made formal complaints to the management, but they, sensing he had transgressed, told him to work out his own problems. Thereafter, each morning he would bring down Teutonic curses upon us as we bumpily bumped the trunk along.

Our prop wagon, a 36 foot trailer truck, carried everything needed for the acts, including the ring curbs. Our greatest burden was the big white box, a huge crate with all the equipment for the break-away act, the metal frame for the jump board, the steel trapezes,

cables, blocks, falls, etc. The box weighed well over four hundred pounds and had to be carried about fifty yards to the center ring. Six men could tote it handily, but we never had six, some of the crew would vanish when the time came. I felt lucky when we had four men willing.

One bright morning, Tommy offered to cover all bets that he could carry the box to the center ring alone. He was a young good natured guy who had hired on mid-season. His build was slighter than my own and I could scarcely conceive lugging that box. We didn't take him seriously but he was persistent and guys began putting money up. The word traveled fast and soon other crews wanted a piece of the action. Tommy agreed to cover everything if he lost, but I knew he didn't have a dime. He kept grinning and I thought if this is a scam, they'll bury him on the lot.

The box was sitting on the tailgate and Tommy looped a webbing belt around it and then passed it over his forehead, adjusted it and tied it off. When he had the sling in position, he bent over as far as possible and moved forward as the box slid on the metal floor. When it was halfway off the tailgate, he put his arms behind him, grasped the bottom edges of the box, and as he stepped away, it slid onto his back. He was bent double, incredibly weighted down as he slowly moved toward the big top one step at a time. A huge entourage escorted him to the ring. The box had to be placed just outside the center ring on the right hand side. When he got there, he just sank down allowing the rear of the box to hit the earth. Slipping out of the webbing, he leaned back and the box stood on end. Moving around it, he gave the top a smart shove and it fell over in place!

Well, a roar for Tommy! He was rich! He had made about five weeks pay in fifteen minutes. That night after tear down, Tommy bought our drinks. We hadn't known that he worked for a cross country moving outfit before joining us.

After that, for some reason people stopped complaining about the big white box, myself included.

Paul Hudson was our transportation boss in charge of the convoy and the drivers. Driving was not a profession on the show, it was something the workers did in addition to their jobs whether or not they had a license. The word was, "Stop for coffee if you need it but don't get caught, it's a five dollar fine."

Paul, a giant of a man, was married to Christine, an English bally broad, and their trailer was the company store. Paul stocked soap, razors, work clothes, shoes, cigarettes and more at fair prices. He also sold "Dukie" cards which amounted to scrip that could only be used on the lot. "Dukies" were bought on credit and could be exchanged at the "Grease Wagon" for coffee, hot dogs, candy or soda.

In the morning set up, Paul was the pole catcher. Once, when the canvas was raised higher than it should have been, Paul couldn't reach the target ropes. In a flash I was on my hands and knees and Paul, standing on my back, was able to secure the pole. He helped me up visibly moved, saying, "You didn't have to do that." I was puzzled by his concern; it seemed to me the expedient way to solve the problem. Paul was the man in the sou'wester who hired me that rainy night in another world. After all I did tell him I had a strong back.

It had rained all day on a lot in Illinois and by tear down, the trucks had sunk to their axles in a seething field of mud. Every rig had to be pulled out to the highway by a team of elephants. The rain increased and the tumbling black clouds flashed white networks across the sky. We had to lead the skittish horses through the muck to their trucks out on the distant road. I had two sorrels, my hands thrust through their bridles. We were slogging through the morass when a shaft of lightning split the darkness and an avalanche of thunder fell from the sky. The horses, spooked out of their wits,

dashed across the field dragging me with them. I couldn't get my feet under me or my hands free of the bridles. I was covered with mud spattering up from their hooves.

When they had finally run their course, they stopped, their flanks heaving in the rain. They hadn't run toward the highway, so our journey was increased by their side trip. There was no sleep that night for anyone.

Four college boys hired on for the summer and two were posted to my crew. Good news, a couple of young bloods would ease things for my overworked guys, but by evening, both quit, taking a third friend with them. The last left in the morning. They were in better shape than I was when I joined but it wasn't important to them and it wasn't the lark they'd imagined.

There was a man who had always wanted to run off with the circus. His son fulfilled his dream by doing so. It was a great human interest story, complete with a local reporter and photographer, and



Long-time Mills elephant boss K.Y. Sagraves, in white hat, with his charges at Elyria, Ohio on June 12, 1955.

Jack Mills doing his best to look avuncular. After a final hug from dad, the boy was assigned to ring stock. On the jump the next morning, the truck he was riding in went over an embankment. They had to shoot some of the horses. The boy was paralyzed.

One evening a middle aged man wandered about the lot. Later after tear down, we ran into him in a nearby tavern where he bought us drinks and told us how he'd always wanted to run away with the circus. By the time we headed back, he had decided to hire on. The next jump was a hundred and fifty miles. When we arrived, he found a phone and called his wife to pick him up. All the magic of the night before was gone. He sat out by the highway waiting, a study in dejection. He had been bedazzled, and this was as close as he would get to being "with it."

There's an old circus gag that never fails to bring down the house. A clown throws a bucket of water over a colleague and runs like a bat. Dripping wet, the clown chases after with another bucket and as the first clown ducks in front of the grandstand, his pursuer hurls the bucket's contents into the crowd. The folks always scream just before they are "drenched" with confetti.

It is necessary to establish that there is water in the first bucket to make the gag work, but during the chilly fall weather the clowns frowned on being doused.

On a cold night in Michigan, I was coiling ropes between the rings, when the lead clown began the gag by dumping the bucket

over me. I was speechless and sputtering; the audience loved it. I loved it when they screamed over the confetti, but I wished it had been water.

My closest friends on the show were Jeff and June Dewbury, the dwarf clowns. June, a Canadian, was in her twenties; Jeff, forty-odd years old, came from an affluent family in England. He had received a classical education from tutors, and read Latin and Greek.

Unlike midgets, dwarfs have normal torsos and stunted legs. They tire easily when walking and obstacles are difficult to negotiate. In the morning set-up, it was Jeff's job to lay out wooden stakes for the big top, but if the lot had tall grass, he was unable to make his way to the stake and chain wagon. I volunteered to carry him on these occasions and it happened about twice a week. Jeff, hating it, allowed me to lift him up and bring him through the rampant weeds or over rough terrain. I would set him down and walk away. We never spoke on those mornings.

Later in the day, when time allowed, we talked of many things. They were a jolly couple possessed of great wit. Now and again, Jeff would grouse at June for being an inept housekeeper and I always took her part till he subsided.

One Sunday evening they got a lift to town and had dinner at a restaurant, but when it was time to head back there were no taxis. I found them sitting by a small square, worried and somewhat desperate. The two mile distance to the lot was beyond them so I offered to carry them. Jeff sat on my shoulders and I carried June in my arms. This time we kept up a lively conversation as I plodded down the dirt road surrounded by forest. After about a mile, a squad car pulled up and blinded us with a searchlight. Two cops got out yelling, "What's going on here?" Wearily, I replied, "The circus is in town." With that, they hopped in the car and drove off. June had expected them to give us a lift, but I was glad they hadn't arrested us.

The hardest moment of the season was saying good-bye to them after the last show. For several years I would dream about them. Good dreams at that.

Part of the circus's idea of entertainment seemed to be teasing the audience, like the water bucket gag. The break-away act was another leg pull.

An aerialist climbed up to a jump board high above the ring, no nets here, and leapt out to grab a lone trapeze. When her open hands hit the cross bar, it would break away and she would plummet down. Bungee cords on her ankles allowed her to miss the ground by a few feet. At the point where the trap falls apart, we were to look up and yell, adding a touch of realism. The screams from the crowd were agonizing, but in a minute, she would be right side up, taking her applause in the spotlight.

Then there was the runaway horse gag. At the close of the Horse Management act, when all the riders had gone over the jump, Junior, one of the ring stock grooms, led a riderless horse down the track. It had no saddle, just a small harness with two tiny American flags. The jump was raised to an improbable height as Junior would stumble against the horse letting go of the lead. The horse galloped off, as the announcer shouted: "STOP THAT HORSE!" It would clear the high jump as the band struck a final chord. As the audience cheered, the horse waited for Junior to lead him out.

The aerialist on the balance trapeze threw in an extra turn in the evening performance without telling the bandmaster or me in advance. As the music ended, I was looking across at the next ring; instinctively I flipped the rope off the pole pin to lower the rig as she should have been on the ground. My arm shot up, I got both hands on the rope but with her weight on the trapeze, I couldn't pull the rope down to the pin to tie off. Not noticing the slight movement

up there, she did one more trick. My arm locked and the pain made the minute or so seem much longer. When she was safely down, I lowered the rig, my arm throbbing and my nerves in shambles.

It was the only mistake of this nature I ever made, and no one had even noticed.

I was sleeping under the stars one warm night when something began nudging my shoulder. Eyes closed, I nudged back and got a heavy thump in return. I looked up and saw a gigantic long black shape silhouetted against the moon; a creature from beyond breathing heavily in my face. I let out a scream, waking the men around me. Jerry was laughing hysterically, "It's only a horse!" he shouted. A horse indeed! It was a literal nightmare!

On one dismal lot, we arose to find ourselves infested with chiggers, vile insects that burrowed under your skin leaving long curving raised welts on your arms, legs, and torso that itched madly. Two thirds of the work force were swabbed down with kerosene which kills the bugs and stops the itching. It took more than a week for the welts to subside. A city boy, I'd never heard of such things. What else awaited me in the wilds of the Midwest?

Toward the end of the season the weather turned chilly. Sleeping outside in northern Michigan meant waking up in a frost covered world. Each man is issued a blanket when he hires on and mine had a large hole in it. Not a bother in the summer, the hole was a distinct liability in October. I tucked the blanket under my head and feet letting my breath warm the interior, but cold air poured in through the cursed hole. I bent my leg, shoving my knee through the opening, effectively sealing it off. In the morning, the knee was numb and I couldn't unbend it. Rolling about in the frost, I creaked the knee till it was almost straight, rather like the Tin Man *sans* oil. I was able to gimp about and in an hour or so I could walk without effort. I was the victim of flawed logic.

On a cold frosty night in Michigan, Red Vigo worked Jenny, while I carried her hook. I was wearing a new blue sweat shirt purchased from the company store. When Red began talking, his breath was visual.

"I don't care what anyone says, it's a hard life. When you came on the show, I thought you'd never last a week, and here you are at the end of the season. You're the only man I ever made a mistake about."

"Red, you'll never know how close you came to being right."

The last performance of the season was called Jinx Night. The props, the rigging and all the paraphernalia of the show were at their oldest after a long, hard season. The logic was, if anything was going to happen, this would be the night. The performers, nervous and a bit giddy, warded off bad luck by appearing in the wrong order, changing their acts, wearing different costumes, and in general, creating chaos. What could they lose, they were leaving the

next day.

It was no surprise to Mark, our announcer. He'd seen it all before, but he did have to keep correcting himself. We in props had to wait and see what act to set for, and try to keep up with whatever cuts or additions were made. Toward the end there was a festive air to the whole mad affair. The performance was trouble free and there were no accidents, which made the precautions seem quite successful.

After the show, as we loaded our truck we could hear the English girls in their dressing tent singing: "It's a Long Way to Tipperary." A long way to go.

It was the policy of the show to withhold the last pay of the season, otherwise they wouldn't have a work force to prepare winter quarters. We came in off the road to a fairground outside of Ashtabula in northern Ohio, several acres dotted with wood frame buildings. Once everything was stored, they would pay us off

The canvas sections, unfolded, were hung up to prevent mildew, and poles were neatly stacked. Everything had its place: stakes, ring curves, props, and of course the animals had to be housed. Life went on. The cookhouse was set up in one building. There were two bunk houses with pot bellied stoves for the men. The elephants had a barn to themselves, and the horses were stabled. Bears, monkeys and our ancient leopard were settled in a 4H building across the way.

As enough hay to last till spring had to be gathered, we drove out to farms and loaded bales right from the fields. Un-

used to working with a hay hook, I had bleeding blisters between my middle and index finger. On return to quarters, we stored the bales in the loft of an enormous barn.

Our hay days behind us, we sought fuel for the winter. At saw mills we loaded wood, the bark covered slabs that were cut off when the logs are squared. At another site we piled stumps and section of trees in our brightly colored trucks. Back at quarters, they set up a huge table saw and days passed cutting up the slabs. We split the logs with axes and the stumps with wedges and sledge hammers. Finally we had enough to keep man and beast reasonably warm for the winter.

Some of the old timers who had no place to go would stay through the winter feeding the animals and repairing equipment. Work would be light and there was a warm bunk house and three squares a day. The pay rate dropped to two dollars and fifty cents a week which was generally figured to be ten packs of "roll your own" and two pints of "sneaky Pete."

An enterprising used car salesman parked a bunch of heaps on the edge of our area with price cards in the window. He figured since many of us would be leaving soon, he could do a little business. He should have done his homework. None of us could afford even those wrecks. The guys would sit in them in the evening,



June and Jeff Dewbury were Wright's closest friends on Mills Bros. They are shown here at a backyard party put on by circus fans at Athens, Ohio on May 17, 1956.



The women in the 1956 aerial ballet were all from England. Everyone on the show referred to them as bally broads. Photo courtesy Harriett Wright.

removing the radios and anything of value.

It had taken at least two weeks to prepare winter quarters and at last we were ready to hit the road. The night before the great scattering we all assembled in the cookhouse for our pay. In addition to what we had coming, we would receive a bonus known as "Road Money." The top four or five bosses had weighed the merits of each man and agreed on an appropriate sum.

Fats called the names and the men filed past the head table picking up their envelopes. As they came back there was a great buzz about who got what. Some had fifteen dollars, others twenty or twenty five. When my turn came, I asked about the two week hold back from when I joined. "It took us two weeks to teach you what to do, surely you don't expect us to pay for that?" Um, guess not.

When I opened my "Road Money," I found fifty dollars! FIFTY BUCKS! I was never so proud.

The following is a sample of circus terms I learned. It is known as Lot Lingo.

All Out and Over: The performance is concluded.

Back Door: Performers entrance, a large opening in the side of the big top facing the back yard.

Bale Ring: Heavy steel ring about three feet in diameter around each center pole to which the canvas is attached before being hoisted up.

Back Yard: Performers living quarters: trailers and dressing tents. Facing the Main Entrance, this area is on the right hand side of the big top by the back door.

Bible Backs: Flooring sections for the grandstand, so called because they once folded in three, resembling the old family bible.

Blow the Show: To leave the show for good, usually without notice.

Bull: Any adult elephant, male or female.

Bull Hook: A goad, wood handled with a metal hook at one end, about twenty four inches long. The hook, not sharp, is used as a prod.

Butchers or Candy Butchers: Employees who sell popcorn, cotton candy, etc. in the stands during performance.

Cherry Pie: Extra work, required of performers, because the work force is short-handed.

Clem: A fight between circus workers and town punks.

Concert: Added attraction at extra cost which takes place immediately after the main performance, usually a Wild West show.

Donniker: Outhouse.

Dukies: Tickets that can be used on the lot at concession stands, available to employees on credit. Usually a worker must be on the show two weeks before he's eligible.

First of May: One who has just joined the show, a novice, also a simpleton. May 1 was the traditional opening date of circuses.

Flag's Up: Mealtime, equivalent of "come and get it." When the cook house is ready to serve, the flag is raised on one of its center poles. The first person to see it yells "flag's up," and this is repeated across the lot. In minutes the entire show is alerted.

Front Door: Entrance to the big top used by ticket holders.

Gazooney: A shiftless worker.

Grift: Dishonest practices. In the bad old days, ticket sellers worked for free, making their money by short changing customers. If the ticket window ledge is above eye level, it's crooked.

Hey Rube: A rallying cry, or cry for help in a fight if a worker is set on by townies.

Joeys: Clowns. Named after Joseph Grimaldi, a beloved clown of the early English circus.

John Robinson: A quick show, shortened to get the patrons out before a storm. John Robinson was an early circus entrepreneur who was quick to shorten his show for a variety of reasons. When the name John Robinson is passed around the lot, each performer cuts a few minutes from his or her act.

Kicking Sawdust: Being part of a circus.

Kinker: A performer.

Liberty Act: Horses performing without riders, taking their cues from a trainer.

Marquee: Canopied entrance to the big show at the end of the midway, usually lettered, "Main Entrance."

Mud Show: A circus that travels by truck rather than railway.

Nut: Total daily cost to operate the show. "We've made our nut" means the show took in more than it spent that day. In the nineteenth century, when a circus came into town, the sheriff would take the nut off the axle of the lead wagon to make certain the show paid its bills for food and feed. There were no standard machine made wagons then and each nut was hand made. When the bills were paid, the nut was returned, giving rise to the phrase: "Making your nut."

Old Folks: Monkeys.

Risley Act: Any act where a performer lies on his back and juggles with his feet. Richard Risley was the first to perform this act.

Rosin Backs: Horses used in bareback riding. Their backs are sprinkled with fine rosin to give performers better footing.

Roustabouts: Specifically, big top men, though sometimes used generally to include all circus workers.

Straw House: A completely sold out performance. Straw is put down between the bleachers and the rings to provide seating for the overflow.

Spec: Short for spectacle, the opening parade around the track of all the performers and animals, formerly called the tournament.

Walk Around: Track gags performed by the clowns around the hippodrome track, a diversion while the prop men set the rings for the next acts.

With It: Being part of the circus; a trouper whose heart is with the show. **BW**

PETE CRISTIANI REMEMBERS

PART II

Finding Big Top Thrills Fewer, Young Trouper Opt for Older Women, Gambling, Tinseltown

By Lane Talburt

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Being the youngest son in a large, male-dominated Italian family came with its own set of advantages, as Pete Cristiani was quick to discern during his formative years as part of an elite troupe of circus equestrians and acrobats.

For starters, parental discipline was more lax at the lower end of the pecking order, and "Paraito" found he usually could wiggle out of harsh punishments meted out to his older siblings.

But in the spring of 1939 the adolescent trouper made the mistake of informing his father that he wasn't in the mood to exercise his badly burned leg, the result of an accident six months earlier in the family rail car on the Ringling-Barnum train at Atlanta. "My dad took off his belt and put me in the mood," he chuckled during a January 2011 interview in his Sarasota home.

That Pete was able to hobble about on crutches in his return to Ringling-Barnum was almost a miracle in itself. "When I burned my leg in '38, Doc [Joseph] Houlton told my dad that I wouldn't be able to walk very well, because he wanted to cut off my leg after I developed a bone infection.

"So my dad says to me, 'When you get out of this [Sarasota] hospital, you're going to military school.'

"See, in Venice they had a branch of KMI—Kentucky Military Institute. They were going to enroll me in it, but I talked my mother out of it."

Following six skin-grafting surgeries to repair extensive third-degree burns, the gregarious 14-year-old continued the prescribed daily regimen of exercises along the route.

Under the watchful eye of patriarch Ernesto Cristiani, Pete's workouts consisted of "push-ups and pull-ups on the trapeze bar. It was good training. I started tumbling again, and I got my legs back in shape by running and jogging. But it took a little over a year

before I got my strength back."

Without turning a single trick in the ring, young Cristiani drew his first paycheck from the Greatest Show on Earth in April 1939. Aside from his younger sister, Corcita (Corky), he was the lowest wage earner wage among his nine brothers and sisters who were

widely regarded as the greatest equestrian troupe of the twentieth century. According to circus payroll records, Pete and Corky started at \$33.50 a week, which, of course, their father collected.

Pete was unable to resume his place in the Cristiani troupe until the 1942 tour.

To cite an old saw, time and tide wait for no one. Pete's parents and most of his siblings had left him behind in Sarasota in the winter of 1938-1939 to perform in England. And when they returned to Ringling-Barnum for the 1939 opener at Madison Square Garden, they were not the only Cristianis in the line-up.

John Ringling North had imported the family of Ernesto's older brother Pietro from Italy. Subsequently referred to by the circus community as the "Little Cristianis," this troupe was anchored by five of Pete's cousins—Pilade, Adolpho, Aldo, Remo and Benito. (Benito, who Anglicized his name to Benny, was actually the son of musical clown Italo Fornasari. Throughout his American performing career, he took Cristiani as his surname.)

To avoid confusion with the more established Cristiani bareback riding act, the new arrivals were billed as the Zerbini when

performing their teeterboard routine and the Pilades for their unique acrobatic leaps over elephants.

The leaps, long missing from American circus performances because they were considered too dangerous, were reinserted into the Ringling-Barnum line up by North, who was asserting his own creative influence after wresting control of the Greatest Show on



Pete Cristiani, age 22, on a hot day in Rockford, Illinois, July 12, 1947 on Cole Bros. Sverre Braathen photo, Illinois State University, Milner Library Special Collections.

Earth from other family members in late 1937.

"I swore I'd never be a party to reviving the leaps," North was quoted in the March 20, 1939, *Milwaukee Journal* under the headline "Mankilling Act Is Back in Circus." "But when I found out these people [Zerbini-Cristianis] were doing them anyway, I figured the public might as well see them."



Daviso Crisitani and his wife Louisa did a perch pole act as the Davisos on Ringling-Barnum and later on Cole Bros. This image was taken while they were on Cole in 1947. Pfening Archives.

Antoinette consistently acing the triple somersault; Dorothy Herbert's ménage routine; Hubert Castle's great tight wire act; and trapeze artist La Louisa, the German-born Louise Schroeder, who met and married Daviso Cristiani on the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in the mid-1930s and who doubled as the top half of the Davisos perch pole act. Gargantua the Great, the snarling gorilla, continued to draw big crowds.

The show had a new big top, air conditioned by eight units which essentially pushed air over blocks of ice into the massive tent. Of questionable value, this innovation nonetheless provided fodder for the media. On August 22, for example, the Spokane, Washington, *Daily Chronicle* lauded the innovation as "the most significant thing of all. . . . For the first time in Spokane circus history no handkerchiefs mopped at perspiring faces, no fans waved, no powder fumes assailed noses. Truly the circus has been rejuvenated."

Another new feature was a horse-fair top with 70 steeds next to the menagerie and open for public inspection.

A major change in the 1940 performance was the arrival of Alfred Court, who introduced three rings of wild felines, each being presented in the more genteel, European style of training.

The following year was the last period of "normalcy," if such a term can be applied to the erratic outdoor entertainment business, for Ringling-Barnum and other circuses.

The surprise Japanese bombing of the America's naval fleet nestled in Hawaii's Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought American armed forces into World War II. Even as vociferous advocates of isolationism had restricted any direct military involvement until the "day of infamy," factories across the nation already were being geared up for the global confrontation. Anticipating the need

to teach weapon and fighting skills to thousands of new soldiers simultaneously, the Army quietly opened its first facility to produce training films at Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey, in late 1940. Pete later would fulfill his war responsibilities in the movie training, though at a location on the West Coast.

Belmonte Cristiani was the first of the family to be called to active duty. While being trained at Camp Lee, Virginia, for deployment to Europe, Belmonte unexpectedly was recruited to join the 300-member, all-soldier cast of Irving Berlin's new all-soldier spectacle, *This Is The Army*.

With proceeds benefiting the Army's emergency relief fund, the show opened on Broadway on July 4, 1942. As it crisscrossed the nation, a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* called special attention to one specific routine in his October 16 review. "The soldier who catapults himself across the stage in a dozen breathless somersaults would find it much easier to do the same thing from the back of a horse. For he is Belmonte Cristiani . . . of the famed Cristiani family."

Inclusion of Cristiani in that stage production, and in the later movie version by the same title, would prove to be significant to the family's fortunes in the following decade.

During the later stages of the war, Pete recalled, the Army touring unit briefly appeared in Alaska, where several hundred thousand soldiers were reclaiming the Aleutian Islands from Japanese invaders.

"[Belmonte] realized how enthusiastic the people up there were to see a performance, you know. It was like a celebration." After the family took control of King Bros. in the late 1940s, Belmonte "was always harping, 'Why don't we go to Alaska?'

"When we got into the ballpark business with Bob Stevens [the Bailey Bros.-Cristiani Circus in 1954], that's when they decided to take a shot at Alaska. So we went up and did fantastic up there."

To take up some of the slack due to Belmonte's absence in 1942, the Cristianis increased Pete's roles in the equestrian and acrobatic routines.

John North poured on the pizzazz for that edition. He commissioned classical composer Igor Stravinsky to score "The Ballet of the Elephants," and hired George Balanchine to choreograph it. While most of Walter McClain's bulls didn't exactly dance to band leader Merle Evans' music, the flashy spec still garnered favorable press treatment. (Eleven of the Ringling bulls had been claimed mysteriously by arsenic poisoning in Atlanta the previous November.)

During warm-ups for the 1942 season, the trim, muscular Pete Cristiani caught the attention of a townie-cum-showgirl at the Big One's winter quarters. (See separate story on how Pete became the romantic lead in Connie Clausen's memoir, *I Love You Honey, But the Season's Over*.)

Pete recalls that he and his girlfriend were sunbathing on the Cleveland's lakeside circus lot on Tuesday, August 4—the second day of a four-day stand—when fire interrupted their reverie. The blaze broke out in the six-pole, 320' x 129' menagerie top around noontime while workingmen were in the cook tent dining on their evening meal before the afternoon performance. Fortunately, few spectators were on the lot.

"It started in the menagerie and it jumped from there to the ring stock tent, which had over a hundred horses in there, between the draft horses and the show horses," he explained.

"I'm sure you're aware that the [circus] lot was asphalt. So they had a lot of bedding—straw and hay—down for the horses and the elephants. So when the tent caught fire, that stuff caught fire. And all those animals were tied. Most of the elephants were powerful



Huge crowd on Ringling-Barnum midway, 1942, the Cristiani family's last season with the Big One. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

enough to pull up their stakes. Some couldn't. . . And the straw and hay under them burned their belly and legs. And I will never, never forget that."

Cage animals did not have the ability to escape the inferno. Their deaths were torturous. "Most of the cage floors were made of—had steel in them. So the steel floors got red hot and burned their feet up, and they couldn't go anywhere. A lot of the cage animals had to be shot."

Realizing that the Cristiani family's eight horses were in danger of being engulfed in the nearby equestrian tent, Pete immediately ran to their aid. Two family grooms were already there, cutting the ropes that tied the horses down. "Fraccini and Red must have cut 50 or 60 horses loose. And they let them run away from the fire."

One of the dressage horses took the lead and was followed by many others. The herd ran through the open gates of a nearby fenced parking area—a corral of sorts, he said.

"And that's where they stayed. Naturally, the grooms ran right over there and started holding them. But it was strange that they followed [the stallion] into the parking lot."

Three elephants died as a direct result of the fire. A fourth died the night after.

"One of them got loose and ran over a cliff. See, the menagerie was kind of up from the rest of the lot. [The elephant] wound up about 40 feet down on the railroad tracks. I remember that, looking down the cliff, and the elephant was dead on the railroad tracks. The iron stake and chain was still on her leg."

Workingmen with tractors quickly wheeled the two gorilla cages containing Gargantua and Toto from the connection between the menagerie and big top, thus sparing the show's marquee non-human features.

In the aftermath of the fire, which charred the menagerie top within three minutes—the canvas had been slathered with a water-proofing mixture containing paraffin—"more than 40 animals, some trained, are dead," *Billboard* reported in its April 15th coverage of the tragedy. "Walter McClain, superintendent of elephants, considers it a miracle that of 45 elephants, 41 were saved," the article continued. "Police cordons held off crowds and police with guns aided circus attaches in destroying some animals too badly burned to recover."

Almost 70 years later, Cristiani retained graphic mental images of the injured bulls, even though he did not at the time connect the fate of the animals to his own severe leg burns almost four years earlier.

"When the fire was over, [some injured elephants] were still standing; the flesh, their hides, was falling off of them."

Ringling veterinarian Dr. J. Y. Henderson, who was away from the lot when the fire broke out, rushed to the scene. He was assisted by "about five vets from Cleveland," Cristiani recalled. "They sent for barrels of oil, and they painted the animals with burn medicine."

But the show went on as scheduled, and Cristiani said he and other family members paraded their crowd-pleasing act in both the afternoon and night performances.

And, noted *Billboard*, "the menagerie was open to the public for the Tuesday night performance . . . with sidewalls only. . . . Twenty-three damaged cage wagons were restored within a few hours. One giraffe wagon was demolished. A reserve top was shipped from winter quarters in Sarasota, Fla., for the opening in Akron [on August 7]."

Though the cause of the fire was never fully established, police quickly arrested a disgruntled ex-roustabout, whose claims that he started the blaze were disproved. *Billboard* tossed out another theory: "One of the workingmen who was first on the scene thought that the blaze originated in the roof of the tent, possibly caused by a spark from a passing locomotive, a railroad track being within a few hundred yards of the grounds. . . ."

With only five days remaining in the 1942 tour, Ringling-Barnum lost a commanding presence in the ring and the backyard. On November 23 the Associated Press filed this dispatch from Jacksonville, Florida: "Walter McClain, 44, superintendent and trainer of elephants, was accidentally killed today while helping unload equipment of the big top for a one-day stand."

"Witnesses said McClain, described by circus officials as 'the top man in his profession,' was applying the brakes on a heavy

Pete and Connie Clausen were sunbathing in Cleveland on August 4, 1942 when they realized the menagerie tent and horse top had caught fire. Pete rushed to the horse tent to aid the family's eight equines. This photo was taken soon after the fire was put out. Pfening Archives.



circus wagon loaded with equipment as it was being brought down a runway from a railway flat car and slipped off the side. A wheel of the wagon rolled over him."

Pete, who years later was to acquire a variety of circus animals for his family's shows, said McClain was on the Al G. Barnes show at the time of the Cristianis' tenure there in the mid-1930s. He remembered the trainer as a "nice, nice guy. Dark complexion. A powerful man with a booming voice. You could hear him a half mile away."

When McClain's elephants heard his shouts, Cristiani said, "Their ears would go out. They knew him alright. He didn't baby them. He didn't beat on them but he had worked them over sometimes during their period with him."

Toward the end of the season on October 23, North inked a contract with the family for the 1943 tour. To earn their \$725 weekly payout and "sleeping accommodations to be the same as furnished by the Show during the season of 1942," the Cristianis were to provide the following: "THE CRISTIANI FAMILY (Oscar, Lucio, Daviso, Mogador, Ernesto, Belmonte, Paraizo, Ortans, June, Corcato and Marion) to present jockey act with comedy and new routines as required. To perform full twisting and passing somersaults from horse to horse as performed during past seasons. Three single ladies' or gentlemen's principal acts as may be selected by the show.

"Spring board acrobatic act by the Cristianis including somersaults through hoop to four man high and somersaults to chair by Ortans Cristiani. Track tumbling if required.

"All riding and acrobatic acts to be the same as furnished by the Show during the season of 1942."

Pete pointed out that this contract did not include Louise's trap act and her routine with Daviso on the perch pole, for which they were paid \$550 a week.

The contract of the Cristianis-Zerbinis—comprising Remo and Chita, Tripoli and Cossette, and Bennie Cristiani-Zerbini—was not

renewed. They became an independent act in nightclubs and theaters at the end of the 1942 Ringling-Barnum tour.

Even with the Cristiani family giving the show a valuable boost, Pete said his father and brothers sensed that some circus brass felt that "we were getting too much money. John North was spending a lot of time in Europe, and Henry [John's brother] was on the show all the time. His problem was he could see all that money going out [to the Cristianis], and I guess that he was trying to prove to the stockholders that he was trying to be cheaper, or something."

Meanwhile, Johnny North was floating ideas about the show's future which didn't set well with many Ringling family members.

Due to increasing shortages of able-bodied performers and workers due to the draft, and accelerated rationing of material critical to the war effort, the North reportedly was considering a move to mothball the circus train and performance at winter quarters for the duration.

This and other factors—chief among them the continuing feud among Ringling family members—led to the end of North's five year reign at the top and, by extension, Art Concello's tenure as general manager. Robert Ringling, through a shift in the shareholder balance, was elevated to the presidency.

The Cristianis saw the handwriting on the wall.

"The family decided they wanted to take out on a different venture, because they'd been on the Ringling show five years," Cristiani explained.

By the time Henry North engaged the family in contract talks to extend their stay on the Big One into 1943, "my brothers were negotiating with this Broadway thing," Pete said.

"But when Robert Ringling found out we didn't want to come back, he got kind of angry because we didn't want to stay when he was there."

The Cristianis were widely perceived within the tight-knit community of performers as being favorites of North's. These feelings more than likely were fed by the playboy's amorous pursuit of Chita, the oldest Cristiani sister, soon after the family was brought onto the Big One from the Barnes show at the outset of the 1938 Ringling-Barnum season. Not long after Chita rejected him, North married an entertainer in Paris.

When the four sections of the Ringling railer pulled out of Sarasota in the spring of 1943, none of the Cristianis was aboard. With Robert Ringling's consent, the family had signed a contract to be featured in a new Broadway play in the works, *Miss Underground*. For seven months, while writers were working on the script, the family drew a weekly salary of \$1,000. In addition, they stayed in a lavish penthouse overlooking Manhattan's Central Park, and their horses were stabled nearby. Pete said the family practiced its riding act almost daily while waiting for the call to begin rehearsals for the play. It never came. The plot, geared to wartime hostilities in Europe, kept shifting, necessitating a never-ending series of rewrites. Accepting the futility of the task, the backers finally cancelled the production.

By the time they were released from the Broadway pact, the Greatest Show had already grossed a phenomenal \$1,000,000 during its opening foray at Madison Square Garden and was well into its under-canvas tour. Flush with success from his first outing as president, Robert Ringling decided on impulse to frame a one-ring, European-style circus for the Garden.

Actually, the Garden's management approached the circus executive with the concept, which they viewed as an opportunity to fill seats in an otherwise unused building during the summer months. Under the unprecedented agreement, the Garden would provide the

arena and the staffing, and Ringling would stage and promote the performance.

The resulting Spangles, the Continental Circus, opened on June 15. Since most performance slots were being filled by surplus Ringling-Barnum acts—some having not been on the Big One in recent years, the stay-behind Cristianis were a natural to be included. The program featured Joseph Walsh presenting Alfred Court's cats, five elephants trained by James Reynolds and presented by Andrea Gallagher, and trapeze artist Elly Ardely; Pallenberg's bears, Roland Tiebor's seals and the Kimris' revolving airplane aerial routine.



Circus personnel tear down the giraffe pen after both its inhabitants succumbed to the fire. Pfening Archives.

Larry Sunbrock, a much-maligned circus promoter, attempted to compete with Spangles by pitching a tent for his equally new Big Top Circus on a theater parking lot. This show collapsed due to poor attendance and Sunbrock's failure to keep up the payroll for performers such as Con and Winnie Colleano, the Yacobis, the Canestrellis (Freddie and Ortans Cristiani-Canestrelli), LaTosca, and the Zacchini cannon.

The Robert Ringling spectacle wasn't faring much better. The Cristianis were inserted into the line-up during the third week of Spangles. The show was not producing the expected results.

Even before it opened, seasoned observers questioned why any circus would want to play the unairconditioned Garden during the summer. Within a month of its bow, the title was altered to emphasize Continental Circus, with Spangles being subordinated in promotional ads.

In an account dated July 16, *Billboard* made this assessment: "Business is only fair, and the terrific heat today, which gives every appearance of continuing over the weekend, is not figured to help the box office."

The best efforts of Ringling publicist Roland Butler, who had been taken off Ringling-Barnum duty to promote the new entry, and newspaper ads hyping low-price seats (the Garden's capacity of 14,000 had been cut down to just over 5,000 for this event) failed to draw crowds.

The show's tub thumpers brashly hawked plans to take the one-ringer on the road for a 32-week tour—perhaps as a means to soften the impact of the newly revealed closing date of September 1. With audience counts seldom approaching the hoped-for 3,200 average, Spangles came to a premature but predictable end on August 17 following a two-month run of 55 playing days, according to *Billboard*.

Once again, the Cristianis were adrift. But not for long.

Veteran producer Clifford Fischer, who had originally scouted the Cristianis for John Ringling in the early 1930s, signed the family to a year's contract on his San Francisco edition of Folies Bergere. The vaudeville-type show opened on November 30, 1943, at the Winterland.

Among former Ringling stars appearing on the same bill with the Cristiani riding act were juggler Massimilano Truzzi, Elly Ardely on trapeze and the Shyrettos' unicycle number.

Pete Cristiani's draft number came up while the family was in San Francisco, but not before Pete attracted the attention of the show's principal dancer, Grace Poggi. The tall, dark-eyed nightclub dancer was at least 10 years older than the muscular, handsome Cristiani. It was no secret that Grace had long been the paramour of Joseph M. Schenck, chairman and founder of 20th Century-Fox movie studios.

(Of significance to circus historians, Schenck at some point in the late 1910s or early 1920s purchased and partially developed Palisades Park in New Jersey on a Hudson River site overlooking Manhattan. The Russian émigré had granted a concession for showing movies in the amusement park to Marcus Loew, who later established a nationwide chain of theaters.)

The twice-married Grace Poggi, whose dance routine cameos were spotlighted in movies with such singer-actors as Eddie Cantor during the 1930s, was summoned to testify against Schenck in a New York federal court in 1941. The Hollywood titan was indicted and convicted of evading more than \$250,000 in income taxes by falsely claiming extravagant personal expenses as legitimate business deductions. In her much-publicized testimony, Miss Poggi revealed that Schenck had given her the use of a \$100,000 yacht for a year and had given her a LaSalle auto, as well as furnishing her a mansion. Schenck served a one-year sentence at the Danbury, Connecticut, federal detention center. He was pardoned in 1948 by President Harry Truman.

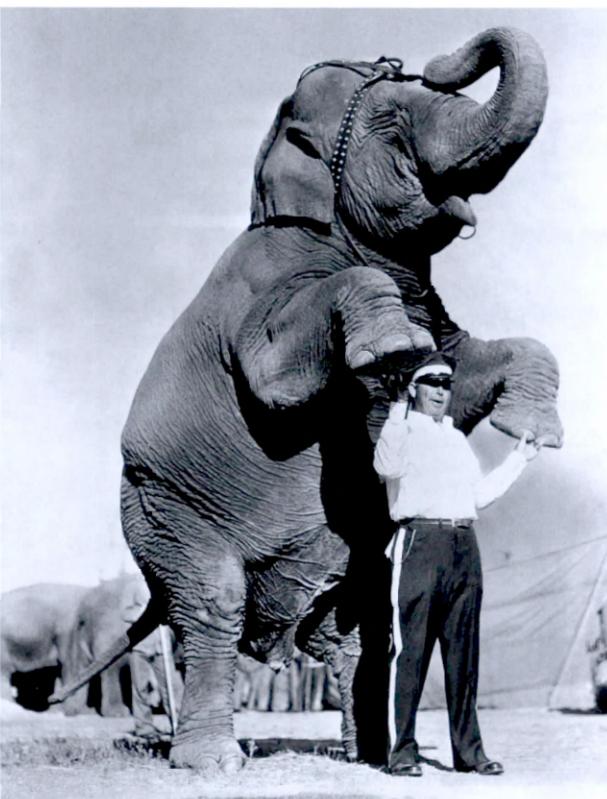
Of Miss Poggi's attentions toward him, Pete simply said, "She liked young guys, so she kind of took a liking to me. She realized that I needed some 'coaching' in my manners."

The young Cristiani may have been following the advice of a young Benjamin Franklin, who, in 1745, wrote: "And as in the dark all cats are grey, the pleasure of corporal enjoyment with an older woman is at least equal, and frequently superior, every knack being by practice, capable of improvement."

Cristiani laughingly recalled that, on the heels of a heated argument with his lady friend, he snatched the keys to her upscale auto and drove it to Bakersfield for a weekend during the family's San Francisco engagement. Miss Poggi would continue to favor Pete with career-advancing support in the months and years ahead.

Pete's 18th birthday on June 24, 1943, made him eligible for the U. S. Selective Service's draft. Army doctors initially rejected him because of his leg burns. "They found that I had developed osteomyelitis," an infection of the leg bone.

"But the second time I took an examination, they didn't think it was quite so severe," Cristiani said. "Not only that, they also needed more men in the Army."



Another tragedy of the 1942 Ringling-Barnum season was the accidental death of Walter McClain, the highly regarded superintendent of elephants. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

Inducted at the Monterey Reception Center in spring 1944, Pete took his basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina. While there he became a naturalized American citizen.

Thanks to Congress passing the Second War Powers Act of 1942, alien residents who completed 60 days in the Army were eligible for citizenship, with the blessings of their commanding officer.

Pete was among some 200 foreign-born trainees who participated in swearing-in ceremony in a nearby Spartanburg federal courtroom.

"Afterwards, the judge asked if I felt any different. I said, 'No.' I felt I was an American all along, even before I took the oath," Cristiani said.

Though placed on limited duty because of his leg, the young soldier was assigned to advanced training in an Army engineering battalion at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas. "We learned to build bridges and then blow them up," he remarked.

By plying his master sergeant with a fifth of Seagram's 7 every week or so, Cristiani secured frequent weekend passes. He snagged a part-time job in nearby Fort Smith at Weldon, Williams & Lick, a specialty printer of circus tickets and posters. This experience would serve Pete well when he launched his own circus in 1961.

During a two-week furlough, which he stretched into four, Pete returned to California where his family was performing at Florentine Gardens, a legendary Los Angeles supper club. He also managed to spend time with Grace Poggi.

"Tough Duty" in Hollywood

Within a few weeks after returning to the Arkansas base, Pete received orders to report to the Hal Roach Studios in Hollywood. (Miss Poggi probably used her contacts in the motion picture industry to help swing the transfer, he acknowledged.) With comedy producer Roach having been commissioned an officer at the outset of the war, his studios were now being used to document rifle-assembly procedures and other combat-related topics.

Given the abundance of Hollywood males whose movie industry skills were deemed necessary to the war effort on the home front, Buck Private Cristiani was relegated to a job not especially to his liking. "I moved props and scenery" for the myriad training films, Pete shrugged.

Pete shared an Army-provided apartment with three other soldiers who were transported by military vehicles to and from their similar "grunt" duty posts at the various Hollywood studios. Like other soldiers, Pete wore fatigues on the film sets and freshly pressed uniforms on the streets and at Army canteens.

Due to the surplus of qualified personnel, Cristiani's work schedule was reduced to two or three days a week. He admitted devoting considerable time in the company of Miss Poggi. The couple was not concerned that her second husband, Ivar de Navogieti, would pop in unexpectedly. The other half of the "Grace and Igor" dance

team was on active duty with the Army in Europe.

After the Cristiani family—minus Pete—completed its run on Folies Bergere in San Francisco, they toured military camps on a circus produced by Frank Woods. Pete recalled that military vehicles moved the show. "They would get paid so much for every camp they played," he explained.

With victory in Europe and the Pacific in sight, the production of training films was sharply scaled down. This enabled Pete to obtain a three-week furlough from the Roach studios in early 1945. He accompanied his family south of the border to perform in a circus produced by Ray Rogers and Howard Y. Bary. Entertainment writer Leonard Lyons reported on this venture in his syndicated column on January 17, 1945: "Sam Rosoff, the builder (described in other reports as a New York subway developer who dabbled in boxing promotions), brought to Mexico City a circus complete with 24 acts, Clyde Beatty's lions, the Cristianis, etc. He played it for 241,000 children, 51,000 adults, made 83,000 pesos, and gave all the profits to the Catholic Blind and the relief groups for underprivileged groups in Mexico."

Cristiani said the ensemble performed in three rings at one end of a soccer stadium that accommodated more than 20,000 spectators in a horseshoe-type setting.

Not long after returning to the movie lot in Culver City, Cristiani received his Army discharge by mail. Thousands of home-front soldiers were being let go similarly, he added, even while thousands of others were being transferred to West Coast bases to await the anticipated invasion and occupation of the Japanese mainland.

Pete was able to reclaim his place in the family's varied acts, along with brother Belmonte, who had completed almost three years performing on the "This Is the Army" circuit. Belmonte was by far in better physical condition, Pete mused. "You get pretty lazy doing the Army stuff [in Hollywood] because you don't have to move all the time."

The riding Cristianis joined Art Concello's newly framed Russell Bros.-Pan-Pacific Circus, named for the sports arena where the show made it indoor

Program for Robert Ringling's Spangles Circus in 1943. In addition the Cristianis, the power-packed performance included May Kovar with an Alfred Court act, the Walkmirs' perch pole act, the Pallenberg bears, aerialist Elly Ardely, the Roland Tiebor seals, and A. Robins, the Banana Man. In spite of the array of talent, the show did poorly. Pfening Archives.

debut on March 29.

Concello, after leaving Ringling-Barnum at the end of 1942, acquired Russell Bros. Circus from C. W. Webb during the 1943 season and continued to move it on trucks—with Clyde Beatty added to the title in 1944 until the close of that tour. As historian William L. Eiburn noted in his May-June 1967 *Bandwagon* article the

imaginative circus executive in 1945 "joined with Jack Tavlin and purchased from Barney Gerety of the Beckman & Gerety Carnival 15 rail cars and enough carnival wagons" to launch the Russell-Pan Pacific outfit.

In his January 2011 interview Pete claimed the Cristianis were investors in the railed. "My brothers had 25 percent in that Russell show," Cristiani said. "Jack Tavlin, I believe, had another 25 per-



Interior of the Spangles ring inside Madison Square Garden. Directly behind the ring are the showgirls, called the Spangelettes. Above them is Henry Kyes and the band.

cent, and Concello had 50 percent of the show."

Concello had both the reputation and deep pockets to attract a stellar management team—many with Ringling-Barnum background, including Frank McClosky, manager; Waldo Tupper, general agent; Roland Butler and William Antes, publicists; Orrin Davenport, director; Vander Barbette, production director; George Werner, lot superintendent, Robert Reynolds, prop master; Dee Aldrich, sideshow, and C. E. "Red" Sonnenberg, concessions. Pete Cristiani's ex-girlfriend on the Big One, Connie Clausen, was listed as working on advance promotions.

Pete's assessment of Concello: "He was an easy person to get along with, very easy to talk to," Cristiani said. "And he knew what the hell he was doing; he knew the business—every bit of it. He usually stood back, but he understood the physical end of it. He was very cordial to everybody—but stern."

The upstart circus did not go unchallenged in its Los Angeles debut. On April 14, *Billboard* reported: "Russell Bros.' Pan Pacific, Cronin Bros.' Big Three-Ring, and Arthur Bros. played day and date here Friday (April 7), with the trio doing good business.

In fact, Buster Cronin's and Concello's shows had been duking it out from Russell's opening on and would continue until both closed on April 15.

In a sidebar article, *Billboard* reported on an old-fashioned paper skirmish between the rivals, apparently instigated by Francis Kitzman's billing crews from the new show on the block: "Russell Bros.' Circus is putting up two sheets daubed over other stands announcing that the circus has 'moved.' Lithoed red over yellow, the boards read: 'Flash—The Circus Has Moved to Pan-Pacific Auditorium.'

"Cronin Bros. is on the 'circus lot' at Washington and Hill streets, and those in the trade are now watching to see S. L. Cronin come out with 'Shows United—Now at Washington and Hill Streets'—or something like that."

Though Arthur Bros. tried its best to derail Russell Bros.' mo-

mentum up the West Coast, the Arthur show's graft eventually caused it to be placed off limits for servicemen.

At the outset of a three-day stint at Spokane, Washington, Concello's organization ran into a hitch typical to many circuses in the aftermath of the Ringling-Barnum fire in Hartford fire in July 1944 which claimed more than 165 lives. The *Spokesman-Review* recapped the event: "The magic of the big top and thrills of a first class show compensated hundreds of fans at the Russell Brothers' Pan Pacific show last night for a long wait in line, occasioned by city officials delayed appearance for final testing of a small section of the tent refluoroproofed during the afternoon."

According to the local review, the star-studded cast did not disappoint: "'Fu,' the only grizzly bear in the world to ride, operate and control a motorcycle, joined with another of Emil Palenberg (Jr.)'s educated bears to win the audience with an exhibition of bicycle riding, scooter pushing, boat rowing, roller skating and dancing....

"Precision bareback riding at its best was featured by the Riding Cristianis, five brothers who somersaulted from horse to horse with the ease with which the average man takes a step. Lucio Cristiani was star and comedian of the act.

"The Konyots, a Czechoslovakian father and daughter who escaped from Europe at the beginning of the war, presented their highly trained horses who rhumba and fox trot in perfect rhythm—and look as though they really enjoy dancing....

"Thrilling the fans in quick succession was a girl performer [Ortans Cristiani] who jumped rope on horseback, and a sequin-clad beauty [Louise Cristiani] who hung from her feet and did handstands with her feet touching the big top, while balancing on a long pole held on her partner's head [Daviso].....

"Musical background was by Henry Kyes, 'the Paul Whiteman of the white tops,' and his [20-piece] band."

Pulling out all the stops, the Russell opening spec showcased Frank "Bring-'em-Back-Alive" Buck, who then announced Dick Clements's lion act. The impressive program also featured five elephants trained by Mack McDonald and presented by Norma Rogers, the Flying Concellos—*sans* Antoinette, and a clown alley headed by Albert White and Dick Lewis, the latter also performing a rocking stacked-chair comedic turn.

Pete said this circus was a Sunday School show. He explained

that Tavlin nixed all forms of graft.

Fun-maker Lewis, in his April 14 submission to *Billboard's* "Dressing Room Gossip" column, praised the Cristianis' contributions to the overall performance: "Besides their bareback riding and teeterboard routines, they ride ménage, work in the aerial numbers, hustle props; in fact, they are all over the show."

After being scattered during the war, the family settled in nicely on the Russell train. "It felt like we were right at home," Pete recalled. "My mother was happy. She was there in the kitchen, cooking at night when we came off the lot. And she was in her glory," the retired kinker added, smiling broadly.

The inaugural—and as it turned out, only—tour under the Russell-Pan-Pacific brand took the highly-organized, tightly-knit troupers through the northern Rocky Mountain states and into America's heartland. A July 7 *Billboard* posting reflected their camaraderie: "Out of the whirl of 14 weeks on the road has evolved the Pete Cristiani Boxing Association. All paid-up members gather in the big top between shows and fan each other for a couple of rounds." Pete observed his 20th birthday on the Russell show.

Still later, Lewis jested in his column that Pete had been added to the "I Couldn't Make the Train Club," along with Brownie Gudath, Joe Willis and [Willis] Lawson and Snoopy Ike. "Orrin Davenport is president of that club," Lewis wrote. "It seems that the boys lingered for just one more and missed the streamliner, the Pan-Pacific, [which] was on the way to Austin (Texas) without them."

When his performing skills were not required in the riding and tumbling acts under the big top, the youngest Cristiani brother devoted as much time as possible to activities on the midway.

In particular he kept his eyes on candy butchers Wills Lawson and Whitey Perry.

"Between the two of them, they handled a lot of money. That's what caught my attention more than anything else. They were talking about how much stock was used, how many cotton candy cones, how many popcorn boxes. And how to cut [the money] up. They had some kind of secret code. They'd use different terms—single, double, saw-buck and all that; 'this for the show and

that for me....' I was interested in the money piled on the table."

To be honest, Pete reflected, "I was never too interested in the performing end of it. I was only interested in it because [my family]



The Cristianis did a first rate teeterboard routine on Ringling, Russell and Cole in the 1940s. In this photo, taken on Cole Bros. in 1946, Ortans Cristiani is about to land on brother Lucio's shoulders. Beneath him are Oscar and Daviso. Pete, on left, spots for his sister. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

needed me to be. That's what kept the circus going: concessions. It just fascinated me."

While the show continued to clean up at the ticket wagon, it also faced bad weather as it tracked through Oklahoma.

Billboard's October 6 missive summed up the repeated watery baths: "Midway through the night show (at Ada on September 25), a hard wind and rain storm struck so severely that the performance was cancelled. A three-quarter house missed the last half of the show. No matinee was given."

Concello called off the tour somewhat prematurely on October 10, going into winter quarters at the El Paso fairgrounds after playing the coliseum there. *Billboard* attributed the closing to "the poor

Bros. personnel director Col. Harry Thomas—to a Russell lot to entice the family to switch to the larger circus.

Pete said he later accompanied brothers Lucio and Oscar to the Cole winter quarters at Louisville, Kentucky, fairgrounds to finalize a deal with Terrell, who had been the sole owner since partner Jess Adkins died on tour in 1940.

Between the close of the 1945 tour and the 1946 season, however, Terrell reportedly had been negotiating with two suitors for the sale of Cole Bros.—Ben Davenport of the Dailey show, and Broadway producers Billy Rose and Mike Todd.

"It is reliably reported that Ben Davenport offered to lay up to \$350,000," according to the April 20, 1946, *Billboard*. "Both bidders are reported to have offered the exchange in any manner Terrell wanted it—a healthy down payment and then installments, or all of it on the head."

"Terrell shunned these offers and then dug deep into his own bank roll to add five cars, making it a 30-car show."

Pete said tempers flared during the contract negotiations, with the wily owner pleading that he was short of money to meet the Cristianis' salary demands. "He was tough," Cristiani said of Terrell. At one point Pete said he stomped out of the room, and when he returned, his older brothers had narrowed the salary gap to within \$50 of their target.

To make up the difference, the circus owner, feigning capitulation, offered the Cristianis the gilly bus privilege to shuttle show personnel between the train and distant lots. After signing the agreement, Cristiani laughed, "We found out Terrell had never had a gilly bus on his show. Instead, performers were catching local cabs at their own expense."

Pete said he purchased a new school bus at the outset of the 1946 season. The family recovered the investment by selling books of tickets to circus personnel. The bus driver was clown Dick Lewis, who apparently preferred the open highways to rail travel anyway. When the family sold the bus at the end of the 1949 season, the brothers recouped three-fourths of the original price, Cristiani said.

Despite their bickering at the bargaining table, Pete described Terrell as "a nice, nice guy. He would act tough, but he was a cream puff, really, when you got to know him better."

The final contract actually served both parties well. Terrell had nailed down a good source of premiere circus acts, and the Cristianis had a solid employer with an excellent reputation. In addition, their home away from home was far superior to any they had enjoyed on the Hagenbeck-Wallace, Barnes, Ringling-Barnum or Russell-Pan Pacific trains.

Accommodations for the troupe on the Cole train were relatively plush for those times. Ernesto and Emma Cristiani and the single family members occupied a full car, while the married brothers and their wives and children had two staterooms in the adjacent coach.

The family car "was not laid out for economy; it was laid out for comfort," Pete explained. "There was a huge living room—it was about 25 feet; then there was a kitchen and a dining room, and bathrooms and bedrooms at the other end."

Given the fact that the owner had ample space left over when he added the five cars to the train's consist, "Zack Terrell didn't really care how much room you took. The cars were there."

Terrell's quest to field a stronger performance with each passing season took the 1946 Cole Bros. to a higher level.

The show's press releases boasted of numerous animal acts.

Billboard writer Pat Purcell offered gushing praise in his April 27 review of the first-night event at the Louisville fairgrounds: "Zack Terrell's 12th edition of the Cole Bros.' Circus, unveiled



The Cristianis were on Arthur Concello's Russell Bros. Pan-Pacific Circus in 1945. Lucio, by then doing comedic riding, is kneeling in front right. Pete is standing on far right. Circus fan Paul Van Pool took this photograph when the show played his home town of Joplin, Missouri on September 10. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

condition of the big top, not to mention the rain of recent weeks." Back east, Hunt Bros. also quit the tanbark trail early for similar reasons.

Cristiani revealed another reason for the abrupt shutdown. According to *Billboard*'s "Circus Routes" department Russell Bros. was slated to set up at Bisbee, Arizona, on October 13. Circus partner Tavlin, complaining of ill health, quit the tour in its final weeks. Traveling ahead to handle the advance in El Paso, Tavlin cashed a number of blank checks co-signed by Concello and "cleaned out" the show's bank account, Cristiani alleged.

Though Concello may have lost money overall, Pete said the Cristianis came out okay, since they were drawing a weekly payout for performing multiple routines, plus a percentage of the profits along the way.

For the 1946 season the show's ticket wagon was repainted as "Clyde Beatty Circus," along with the rest of the Concello-owned rail cars and vehicles.

But the demise of the former trapeze star's 1945 Russell Bros. did not leave the Cristianis in the lurch. They were already signed to perform at a number of Orrin Davenport winter dates.

The troupe had another ace up its sleeve: an offer to hop aboard another circus train for the 1946 season. In 1945, Cole Bros. owner Zack Terrell had dispatched an emissary—Pete believes it was Cole

here Thursday (April 18), is definitely a showman's show and by far the most entertaining and thrilling of the series, one that seems destined to win the approval of visiting firemen as well as the urban and suburban gentry who lay it on the head for \$1.20 for the blues or \$2.40 for the grandstand chairs. . . .

"He spared no expense refurbishing the equipment, and he kicked up the expense by making two notable additions—the Cristiani family and the Chambertys (casting act).

"The versatility of the Cristianis most assuredly strengthens the program, as in addition to their socko riding act, they offer a whirlwind teeterboard turn, and a perch act that could center ring any performance. . . .

"The Cristianis completed their chores for the night with their family riding act, six men and four girls, that has long been a top attraction. . . .

"Without these additions the program would have been strong, as Terrell's old standby, Paul and Ruth Nelson, added to their apparently endless repertory of routines.

"Thus Terrell is moving into his 42nd year as a circus campaigner with a show designed to please, even tho it cost him a hatful to get it that way. . . .

"It will move on 15 flats, 9 coaches, 4 stock and 1 storage with 1 in advance. . . .

"As a means of accelerating sentiment of the natives on circus day, Terrell had the old America wagon, which stood unprotected from the elements at winter quarters for six years, completely overhauled and refurbished, and equipped with a steam calliope. Noonday concerts will be given on the circus grounds, and it will be hauled into the heart of various cities by baggage stock when it can be arranged."

The Cole clown alley was one of the strongest in the business. It consisted of producing clown Otto Griebing, Freddie Freeman, Joe Wilde, Alfred (Billie) Burke, Howard Bryant, Brownie Guldath, A. C. (Huffy) Huffman, Galifili Bagonghy, Lawrence Cross, Chamberty Trio, Billy Hudson and Dick Lewis.

From top to bottom, Terrell's management team rivaled that of Concello's on the Russell-Pan-Pacific railer. Starting with Zack as general manager, it included his brother-in-law, Noyelles Burkhart, as assistant General Manager; his wife, Estrella Terrell as secretary, and Robert DeLouche in the treasurer's position.

Other key staffers were J. D. Newman, general agent and traf-

Another Van Pool picture shows the loaded Russell flats in Joplin in 1945. Note carnival type wheels on wagons, a legacy of the equipment's former home on the Beckman and Gerety Carnival. Pfening Archives.



In 1946 the Cristiani family performed on Cole Bros. Circus. Pete is on the far left. Harry Atwell photo, Pfening Archives.
fic manager; William (Cap) Curtis, general superintendent; Orville Stewart, transportation boss; Eugene (Arkie) Scott, menagerie superintendant; Gene Weeks, concessions superintendent; Paul Nelson, program director; Col. Harry Thomas, performance personnel director, and Harry McFarlan, equestrian director.

A major difference between the Cole and Russell-Pan-Pacific show, however, was the prominent presence of graft on the Kentucky-based circus, particularly in Arthur Hoffman's side show.

Once again, Cristiani was drawn to nefarious activities in the circus front yard—when he wasn't carrying out his familial obligations in the center ring.

"Yeah, I worked on the graft for a while," Cristiani admitted.

"I got to be friends with a fellow by the name of Reno Renoud—a Canadian. I used to stand outside and watch these guys [townies] go up against the three-card monte and the shell game.

"Reno was a hell of a dealer. He would actually insult people. He'd say, 'Why would a smart-looking fellow like you try to beat me at my game?' He'd look at them right in the eyes. 'I know this game, and this is how I make my living. Why do you want to play?' And they'd laugh at him, you know. They thought he was joking. Well, there was a reason for him saying that."

Cristiani explained how the grifter, by working through a shill, encouraged high-stakes gambling.

"The outside guy that was playing with Reno on the three-card monte, he'd make a bet, and he'd bet on the wrong card. And when Reno turned the card over, he'd lose his money. So [the shill] would get mad and throw the card away. And Reno would say, 'Wait a minute. Don't lose your temper; you just lost a little money. Why get mad?'

As the outside man turned around to scoop the card off the ground, the grifter would take one of the two other cards—"the red ace, the hot one"—on his tray table and bend its corner. "That's what they call 'put the lug on the card.'

"So Reno would come back as if nothing had happened. He'd say, 'You guys don't have to get mad at me; it's only money. If you lose, be a sport; if I lose, I'll be a sport.' And he'd start dealing. 'Again, if you can spot the red one, put

your money on the red one. You win with the red.'

"But what Reno was doing, he would take the lug off the red card, and put the lug on one of the black cards. Those were special cards that were made in Canada, and the lug would go off real easy.

"So this mark—we called them suckers—would grab the card with the lug on it, reach in and pull his wallet out and bet whatever money he had—fifty dollars, a hundred. And he was holding the card so Reno couldn't switch it. This guy was going to outsmart Reno, and he'd think, 'I've got the card now!'"

Cristiani also became a student of the shell game.

"When Reno was dealing the shell game, he used a little ball made out of sponge. They called it 'the pea.' And he'd wheel it around and around, and—what we call—leave it 'on the cock' so that you could see it from the outside.

"So the mark would say, 'I want to bet on that one!'

'Oh, so you want to bet on that one?' And Reno would push [the shell] forward a little bit, and as he did, the sponge would go between his two fingers. And he'd clamp it.

"'You want to bet on that one? Put your money down.' As soon as the mark lost his money, Reno would slip it back under another shell. And Reno would say, 'You bet on the wrong shell. Here's the

Cole Bros. Circus sideshow at Indianapolis, May 3, 1946. Sideshow manager Arthur Hoffman is on the bally stand making the opening. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.



pea right here.' You know, the guy couldn't believe what happened to him."

Pete recalled one instance when the grifter fleeced a young man while Cole Bros. was playing Oakland, California. "He was a white guy—nice-looking fellow, well dressed. He had lost \$2,000 on the card game."

But the sucker wasn't through.

"When he came back to the lot—we were in Oakland four days, Reno was dealing the shell game. And [the mark] had seven or eight thousand dollars in his pocket. And he lost every bit of it in the shell game.

"As a matter of fact, Joe Haworth was the fixer on the show. And he tried to tell the young man, 'Come with me; I'll let you see the circus.' He pushed Joe Haworth aside and said, 'I've got money to buy my own tickets.' He still had a wad of money in his pocket, and he went with his girlfriend to buy the best seats and see the show. And that was the end of that; we never saw him again."

As it turned out, said Cristiani, "his father had a bookmaking joint, and [the mark] was either a drug dealer or a pimp.

"I couldn't believe anybody would lose that kind of money. But Reno wasn't impressed at all. He said, 'When I was working the [train] station in Montreal, I've had people lose a lot more money than that.'"

Cristiani, who would leave his family four years later to manage

the gambling on Ben Davenport's pie car, was asked to cite the differences between graft operations on Cole Bros. and Dailey Bros.

"None whatsoever," he replied. "They had the same setup. The only difference was on the Cole show there were three gambling groups [to Davenport's two] on the show. No, four really."

In addition to the three games inside the side show, "one was outside, which they called a 'roll-down,' where you would play the games. And they would build [the townies] up from teddy bear prizes to cash, and then for more cash, and so on. It was real skillful, but they owed a lot of money."

Which prompted another question: Was graft just as much a factor in moving Cole as it was on the Dailey railer?



Cole Bros. executives posed for this photo on August 13, 1945 in Racine, Wisconsin. Left to right: Frank (Dutch) Wise, Superintendent of Tickets; Cecil LaBelle, Superintendent of Front Door; Emmett Sims, Press Agent; Noyelles Burkhart, General Manager; Zack Terrell, owner; Estrella Nelson Terrell, Secretary; and Frankie Orman. LaBelle was Pete's mentor, teaching him about the operation of a pie car and privileges. Burt Wilson albums, Pfening Archives.

"I think in all honesty that Zack Terrell got the best count of any owner that I had the opportunity to be around."

How did he accomplish that?

"Well, he just had discipline around the show. And they respected him because he had been a grifter himself. That's how he made enough money to get his own show—him and Jess Adkins."

"Ben Davenport was most concerned about the physical equipment of his show—the train, and the moving of his show. And he left the concessions and the graft—the graft he left to Joe Baker, and the concessions to Harry Hammond."

"On the Dailey show [Hammond] checked the merchandise in and out and the amount of money they were grossing—him and Butch Cohn [the Dailey treasurer]. Cohn and Hammond weren't . . . uh . . . careful with how much was being grossed."

By comparison, "Zack Terrell had a man by the name of George Davis that was strictly loyal to him, and he ran all the food concessions—not the pie car but down at the circus grounds."

Pete's attention was diverted even further away from the big top during the 1946 season. The lure of Hollywood—and potential stardom on the silver screen—caused him to leave the family for a

second time. Once again, Grace Poggi was a driving force.

"I wasn't [on Cole Bros.] the whole '46 season," he elaborated. "When we were showing the Pan Pacific auditorium in Los Angeles in '45, a fellow went back and knocked on our dressing room door. He introduced himself as Harry Wilson, and he was an agent for Selznick Studios. (David O. Selznick's company produced the box office hit *Gone With the Wind*.)

As it turned out, Dory Schary, a prominent Hollywood director, wanted to interview young Pete for a part in a movie. In the meantime, the Russell-Pan-Pacific train—with Pete aboard—pulled out of the City of Angels to make its under-canvas route.

Talent agent Wilson followed up with Pete while he was on the Cole show to arrange for a screen test. He left the circus train in Kansas City and drove to California with a friend, David Budd, who later courted Pete's sister, Corky, on Terrell's show. Pete and Dave had become best friends while the latter was attending the Ringling Art Institute in Sarasota.

"Anyway, I took a test and they offered me a contract for \$250 a week, and they would furnish a place to stay."

"They sent me to a famous Hollywood photographer, John Frederick. They wanted still photos, which they did for all the guys." (See Pete's Hollywood portrait with this article)

While Budd, who later developed a worldwide following as an abstract artist, was able to ply his skills at a Tinseltown scenic studio, Pete was biding his time in a Wilshire Blvd. apartment with three other contract players, waiting to be summoned by the studio's casting department.

He asked one of his roommates, Clyde Hoyt, "How long have you been here?"

"About two years," came the reply. "As long as I'm getting paid, I'm going to hang around here. Maybe one of these days I'll have a part."

Another roomie, Steve Rose, acknowledged that he and a number of other hopefuls were taking acting and voice lessons.

"Have you done anything else besides that?" Cristiani inquired.

"No," the aspiring actor said. "They're 'developing' me."

(Pete sidetracked the interview to point out that he had extended his Hollywood sojourn to about two and a half months in large part due to Grace Poggi's charms.)

Admitting that "I was missing the circus," Pete finally called the family's Hollywood agent, who confirmed the 21-year-old kinker's nagging suspicions. "He told me, 'Pete, I don't blame you for wanting to leave. I've got some guys that have been out here for five years and haven't done a thing.'

"Well," I said, "they're still getting paid."

"Yeah, they're getting paid," said the agent. "But they're on call all the time. Sometimes they're just extras, walking around for background."

After conferring with Miss Poggi, "I decided to give it up and went back to the circus," Cristiani recalled.

Late in the season the show was routed into Los Angeles for a 10-day run, and Pete once more delighted in Miss Poggi's company whenever he could get away from the circus lot.

Pete remembered seeing "three rows of people from the movies" at one weekend performance following the September 27 opener. Among those actors taking in a Cole performance, wrote *Billboard* stringer Freddie Freeman, were Poodles Hanneford, who had a series of celluloid roles under his belt, Jackie Oakie, Wallace Beery, Charles Coburn, Franchot Tone, Robert Preston, Elsa Lanchester,

Gregory Peck, Shirley Temple, Rudy Vallee and Alfred Hitchcock.

In the same magazine, Freeman singled out the Cristiani's teeter-board routine for praise. "Ortans Cristiani doing the best job of top mounting this writer ever saw. Her four-high is a pip, Daviso and Pete as understanders aren't so bad, either, and for a middle man, give me Lucio."

Pete recalled that "Daviso developed a rupture [during the Los Angeles stand], and I had to step in. I hadn't done the routine for a while, and it was hard to hold Oscar on my shoulders and Lucio on Oscar's shoulders, with Ortans making it four-high from the teeterboard."

The October 19th *Billboard* also noted that big top boss Cap Curtis "used all steel stakes on the Los Angeles lot [at Washington and Hill Streets], one of the hardest in the country. He is still harassed by the labor shortage. Present roster shows 152 working men to move the 30-car show. School kids and transient laborers are still being used to help get it up and down.

Not so well publicized was Curtis's supplementing the work force with some three dozen clowns and show-girls to set up chairs on the bibles each day, Cristiani said. For this "cherry pie," the performers got an extra \$3 a day. Their side jobs also entailed tearing down the chairs after the final show at each stop and taking them to the chair truck for the haul to the circus train's runs.

Cole Bros.' Texas-based rail competitor, Dailey Bros., apparently had better luck retaining its workingmen.

As *Billboard* writer Justus Edwards expounded in that same October 19 edition, Ben Davenport's "Dailey Bros." Circus adopted a policy of paying off every day, as a lure for getting and keeping help. This practice . . . is one of the things that makes the Dailey show unique. A few actors and execs are paid on a weekly basis, but all the rest line up in the privilege car each night for their money. There are no hold-backs, and most contracts are verbal. The nightly payoff is handled by Bertha Drane . . . whose association with Ben and Eva Davenport dates back to their medicine show days."

Mrs. Drane would still be at her post in 1950 when Pete Cristiani became Davenport's pie car manager.

Cristiani emphasized that Cole Bros. paid its laborers weekly. Otherwise, the privilege cars on both shows basically functioned alike.

This writer, who had interviewed both Pete and Norma Davenport Cristiani extensively over the past decade, assumed—wrongly—that Ben Davenport simply gave Pete the pie car job so that the Cristiani family expatriate could be closer to Norma, his new girlfriend (The couple exchanged marriage vows during the 1950 tour.). In a 12-foot area at the front of the car, workers and performers sat around a table or on several stools and cut up jackpots over food and drink. Bob Foster had the food concession on the train.

Pete said he rarely consumed alcoholic beverages—except during meals served by Mama Cristiani in the family's private car. It's a practice, he says, he continues to this day. He attributed his aversion to heavy drinking to spending his boyhood years on the Cristiani family circus in Italy and watching Pietro Cristiani (his father's oldest brother) frequently showing up inebriated on the lot. Uncle Pietro, mused Pete, regularly traveled ahead of the show to the next town, where he ran up big expenses for lodging, food and drink and told his creditors that brother Ernesto would settle up when the circus arrived.

Nor was Pete addicted to gambling, though he professed a love for games of chance. "I learned early that nine out of ten times, you're going to lose," he said.

The bulk of available space in the Cole Bros. pie car was given over to gambling at the poker table. Cecil LaBelle ran that popular game, or shooting craps at a table that could be folded into the wall to throw off suspicious outsiders, and "seven or eight slot machines" that likewise could disappear under a counter.

In reality, Pete learned just about everything about privilege car gaming operations—poker, dice and slot machines—from Cecil La Belle on the Cole show.



Cole Bros. flat cars in 1947. George Hubler photo, Pfening Archives.

To salve his curiosity, he started hanging out in Zack Terrell's pie car after hours during the 1946 tour. He also earned LaBelle's friendship, which enabled Pete initially to observe the gaming activities and eventually to gain valuable hands-on experience in all aspects of the money-making enterprise.

"It was good for me, because it kept me out of trouble on the lot," he acknowledged.

More important, it provided Pete with an independent source of spending money.

Papa Ernesto traditionally managed the money paid to the younger siblings for their participation in family acts. Pete emphasized that "I could always go to my dad when I needed something, and he would give me the money."

Pete said he never received a regular paycheck for assisting the pie car manager, but "if Cecil was having a good week, he'd throw me a hundred dollars or sometimes two hundred."

"I bought a lot of clothes. I liked to wear Florsheim shoes in those days. I was addicted to shoes."

By 1948 Pete became proficient in maintaining the slot machines and emptying their contents, depending on the volume of play.

Whenever activity at the one-armed bandits slackened, manager LaBelle would adjust the screw in the back of some machine—usually before the pie car opened on Tuesday or Wednesday night—to increase jackpot payoffs to 30, even 40 percent, Pete said; the normal payoff rate was 15 percent. "Word would get around the lot that Joe got a big jackpot, and suddenly business picked up," he said.

Pete also helped roll the nickels, dimes and quarters into their paper wrappers. On Friday nights LaBelle gathered the gaming take and, after the manager took his 10 percent cut off the top, delivered it to Cole treasurer Bobby DeLouche in the office wagon. The regularity and dependability of those gambling receipts ensured that DeLouche was always able to make the employee payroll on Saturday, he explained.

As the circus progressed along its 1948 route, Pete's mentor was

frequently sidelined by a heart condition. The young apprentice stepped in to fill the void, often hanging out all night in the pie car.

During their three seasons as headliners on Cole Bros., the Cristiani continued to play winter Shrine and police dates for producer Tom Packs. They also continued buying real estate in Sarasota, their adopted home town.

Performers came and went—wire walker Hubert Castle was a prominent addition in 1947 and Roman rider Jinx Adams jockeyed her 16 steeds around the track twice daily in 1948. But the basic Cole line-up remained static during both seasons.

The June, 1948, *Hobby-Bandwagon* took note of a landmark event. "Cole Bros. Circus added another chapter to circus history when their entire two-hour show was televised over WLWT of Cincinnati, Ohio, Saturday night, May 15th. This was the first circus telecast in the Midwest."

More than 100 attendees at the Circus Historical Society's annual convention in South Bend, Indiana, hobnobbed with Cole Bros. managers and performers when the circus pitched its tents on Sunday, June 20, for two shows the next day. Pete and other Cristiani family members were guests of honor at the Saturday night convention banquet, where a newly composed "Circus Historical Society" march and a companion "Circus Fans Association of America" piece, both by C. L. Brown, were performed by a band of windjammers.

Circus press releases continued to herald the all-star cast in advance of the Cole Bros. train returning to the West Coast in the summer of 1948.

"The Liberty horses, super-educated Palominos (sic), were trained by and presented by Paul Nelson," readers of the *Spokane, Washington, Chronicle* were informed on August 13. "Highly trained horses play an important part in this year's Cole Bros. Circus, but will be supplanted by other acts and displays including the world renowned Cristiani family of bareback riders from Italy; the Flying Thrillers, with Eileen Harold [Voise], who does a two-and-a-half somersault to a catch in mid-air while blindfolded; Ruth Nelson, who rides rearing and high-jumping horses; and Billy Powell, tight-wire star."

As the 1948 tour drew to a close, the Cristianis pick up recurring rumors that Terrell once again was shopping his highly profitable enterprise.

Hollywood publicity photo of Pete Cristiani taken in 1946 by well known photographer John Frederick. Pete Cristiani collection.



Looking back, Pete assessed the situation facing the circus owner. "Zack Terrell was one of the smartest showmen I ever met. He was stern but well liked. The majority of the money that he grossed, he wound up with most of it.

"But times were changing, and he didn't care much about the new business."

Mills Bros., for one, was using sponsored dates and phone promotions, innovations that Terrell steadfastly resisted, Cristiani said. To drive home his

point, Pete said when both shows day and dated in one Midwestern town, the smaller Mills truck outfit reportedly grossed \$100,000 over the phones while the bigger Cole railer was a money-loser at the gate.

In addition, Cristiani reminded, "TV was starting to take hold. The economy wasn't that great. [Terrell] was getting older, and he had a heart condition."

Ben Davenport, a former bidder for the Cole assets, was also in ill health. He had been hospitalized for several weeks late in the 1948 season at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

Adding to the complexity of the behind-the-scenes wrangling, *Billboard* disclosed on November 27 that "two Texas millionaires were reported to be anxious to purchase the Dailey Bros. and Cole shows and combine them into a 50-car show." As events transpired, Harry Hammill, an industrialist in the Lone Star State, purchased half interest in Davenport's five-ring circus from Ben's wife, Eva, after the couple had separated late in the season.

The final curtain dropped on the Terrell Circus Corporation on December 26 as reported in an AP dispatch datelined Louisville: "Sale of Cole Bros. circus . . . was announced Saturday (December 25).

"Jack Taylin, new general manager and vice president . . . reported the purchase price was about \$350,000 [the same figure floated by Ben Davenport more than two years earlier]. . . . He said there will be changes in the show's personnel with new acts. . . .

"Purchasers of the circus, which will retain its name, include New York, Chicago and Miami businessmen who incorporated under the name Hoosier Circus Corp.

"Taylin retained Noyes (sic) Burkhart as manager with the show. Frank O'Donnell, president of Peter Briedt Brewing Co. of Elizabeth, N. J., is the new president of the circus."

Terrell retired to his birthplace in Owensboro, Kentucky. He died at age 75 in August 1954.

Even before rumors of the impending Cole Bros. sale began circulating, the Cristiani family had been contemplating their next venture, Pete maintained.

Meanwhile, the young bachelor was engaged with his latest conquest—of the feminine type. "Pete Cristiani seen walking around with a pretty girl on his arm," was a juicy bit of gossip revealed in the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune's* "Main Street Reporter" column on December 10, 1948.

That "pretty girl," Cristiani recalled 62 years later when the tidbit was read to him, was Gloria Drew, who had been John Ringling North's steady for the past several years. "I took her out a few times," Pete said of Miss Drew. Like many in North's crowd, she was staying at Sarasota's finest hotel at the time, the Orange Blossom.

The Cristiani brothers may have ignored their younger brother's romantic pursuits, but not his growing business acumen.

In early 1949 Pete accompanied Lucio, the family's nominal business manager, on a flight to Houston to consummate a deal making the new generation of Cristianis co-owners of a circus for the first time. Their new partner was undoubtedly the twentieth century's master of circus routing—Floyd King.

Next: Pete Cristiani takes Norma Davenport, the boss's daughter, as his bride, and establishes himself in concessions on a series of family-run shows, including the Cristiani Bros. Circus.

The author wishes to thank Fred Dahlinger, former CHS president and author of several well-known circus volumes, for his valuable research at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, which yielded the time cards for the Cristiani family on the 1938-1942 Ringling-Barnum shows. **BW**

Pete and Connie Sparked *I Love You Honey But the Season's Over*

By Lane Talburt

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Pete Cristiani had no inking when he struck up a romance with a first-of-May show girl in 1942 that he would become the centerpiece of a widely read memoir of circus life some 20 years later.

Almost seven decades after his "mild affair"—as one reviewer put it—with Connie Clausen, Pete responded with occasional chuckles at the recitation of passages from *I Love You Honey, But the Season's Over*.

He nodded in agreement that the pair—Pete was 16 going on 17, and Connie was two years older—met at the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters in February 1942 prior to the departure of the circus train from Sarasota en route to New York City. But he had a different take on how the pair actually got to know each other.



Pete Cristiani and Connie Clausen arm in arm in front of the Ringling-Barnum sleeping cars in 1942. Photo courtesy of Michael Clausen Andersen, Connie Clausen's son.

was leading a horse. Was he a bareback rider or a groom? And who cared? The awful thing was I couldn't find out. I was late for rehearsals, so I had to content myself with a dazzling smile, and hurry on to Mr. [Walter] McClain's elephants. I watched for him constantly in the days that followed, but I didn't see him again and his identity remained a mystery."

Pete's response: "Is that right? I didn't ever remember that. I skipped through that book, but I don't remember reading it." Which is understandable, given the fact that Pete had just launched his first venture as a circus owner—Wallace Bros.—at precisely the same time when *I Love You Honey* was being introduced to readers nationwide in the spring of 1961. (*Reader's Digest* published an abridged version a year earlier.)

Here is Cristiani's version of his introduction to Connie: "In those days Ringling used to have a general rehearsal at their winter quarters over on Boniva. . . . They had 250 acres there, so the rehearsals were there. They used to put a used tent up. And they kept it in storage, because they got a new tent every year. That's where I met [Connie]. She was lined up there with 50, 60 other girls for rehearsal.

"My dad used to bring sandwiches out to us when we had to stay there awhile for rehearsal, from the house. Because my mother and

dad had a home on Tuttle Avenue here, south of there, right off Charlotte. But the girls would have to wait for the cookhouse to open. You know, they would all run over to the cookhouse and get a bowl of soup or sandwich. So anyway they were sitting there, and I offered her a half a sandwich. And she grabbed it, and that's how I met her and ran across her.

"So we started dating down here once or twice."

According to Miss Clausen's book, the young show girl didn't even know the name of the horseman until the circus train stopped on "the second day of our dukey run to New York."

Returning with a bunkmate from a trackside walk to Car 82, the so-called Virgin Car, Connie smelled food being cooked in the adjacent Car 81, which bore the name "The Cristiani Family."

As she recollects, "A young man stepped out onto the platform. It couldn't be, but it was—the 'man with the horse' that I'd bumped into at winter quarters and had been looking for ever since. . . . He stood there smiling down at us. . . .

"Remembering that we didn't know him, he added, 'I am Paraito,' in a tone that might have announced that he was a prince or the Lord of the Jungle."

After inviting Connie and her companion to join the family for a meal inside the converted Pullman coach, Pete introduced the awestruck visitors to his family: "Cossetta, Marquichita, Ortans, Corquita, Oscar, Lucio, Daviso, Eduardo, Bolene, Benito, Adolfo, Louisa, Marion, Palade, Remo, Pietro, Carmen, Nina." These were members of the extended Cristiani family, headed by Papa Ernesto and his brother and their offspring and spouses.

Once Mama Emma intoned the single word "eat," Miss Clausen recalled, "the entire family broke into a torrent of Italian. They talked with such intensity I was sure we had set off a quarrel."

Pete shared similar memories: "My mother used to feed us on the train. And as we were headed towards New York on the train I remember we invited [Connie] in. And sat her down. And she was somewhat confused by all the commotion. Because all my brothers were talking, my sisters, you know. And she sat there like a mummy. Couldn't move. She was frozen. And as a matter of fact, my mother said to me, 'Can't that girl talk to me at all?' She asked me in Italian. I said, 'Yeah, but she's petrified, all these arguments going on in here.' Everybody was talking at one time."



Connie with a politically incorrect elephant on Ringling-Barnum. Photo courtesy of Michael Clausen Andersen.

After Connie returned to the show girls' sleeper, one of the veterans cautioned the neophyte not to get her hopes up. "Circus families are fussier than the crowned heads of Europe about the girls their sons date. They spend years training 'em for the act and they're not going to take any chances of losing 'em to some girl."

Replied Connie: "No wonder Cosetta didn't think I was promising material. They'll probably put Paraito under an armed guard to protect him."

On arriving in Manhattan for the month-long opening stand, Miss Clausen and three others rented an apartment for the duration. "My own romance with Paraito was progressing no more rapidly than my attempts to master a backbend," she wrote.

That's not exactly how Pete remembered their budding courtship: "Once we got to New York everybody stayed at the same hotel, the Belvedere, right across the street from the old Madison Square Garden. So we [Pete and Connie] got kind of friendly there; it was very convenient. [chuckle]. And I wasn't very mannerly in those days. Anyway, we got to be friends. And she was really a nice person—a pretty, intelligent girl."

As the 1942 season progressed, Pete and Connie met whenever possible during the arduous road tour.

"When we went out, it would be on a day off," Cristiani said. "You know, like a Sunday off or something like that. And usually you'd run into everybody you know downtown. Either at the movie or at the drug store having a soda. Or at a lunch counter some place. . . . Once in a while somebody would go along, you know, like my sister Corky. Or my sister Ortans, if she wanted to go to the movies. Or my mother would ask me or my brothers to take them along 'because you're going to the movies with your sisters.' So they would go along, not as chaperones but as friends."

Question: "Did Connie become friends with any of your sisters?"

"Pete: "Yeah. She was good friends with Cosetta and Ortans, two of them. Ortans was two years older than me. And Cosetta was very friendly with her, too. They used to joke around all the time. Cosetta was kidding [Connie] that she was too old for me, that she was abusing me all night, you know, teaching me bad manners. We laughed like hell," mused Pete, breaking into hearty laughter.

Though both lovebirds saw that their fling wouldn't last forever, Miss Clausen said the break came at Rockville, Illinois, shortly after the circus completed a 17-day run in Chicago.

Years later, following the launch of the book, a reporter asked the ex-show girl why she had broken off the affair.

"I didn't. He did," was her reply. "I couldn't even stay on a horse that was saddled, so I just [did not] fit into the act."

And that, reasoned the August 29, 1961, column of *Charlie Rice's The Punch Bowl*, was "the main rule that governs love in the circus."

When the columnist asked if she missed the circus, Ms. Clausen said, "No, because I rebelled and married a 'towner,' and I'm able to have a normal life with our four kids. On the other hand, yes, I miss it because every time the circus comes to New York, I go down to Madison Square Garden and ride the elephants. Sometimes I ride them two or three performances. I tell myself it's just so the children can brag 'my mother can ride an elephant.'

"But I guess the truth is that you just can't forget the circus; it's a case of 'I Love You, Honey, and the Season's Started Again.'"

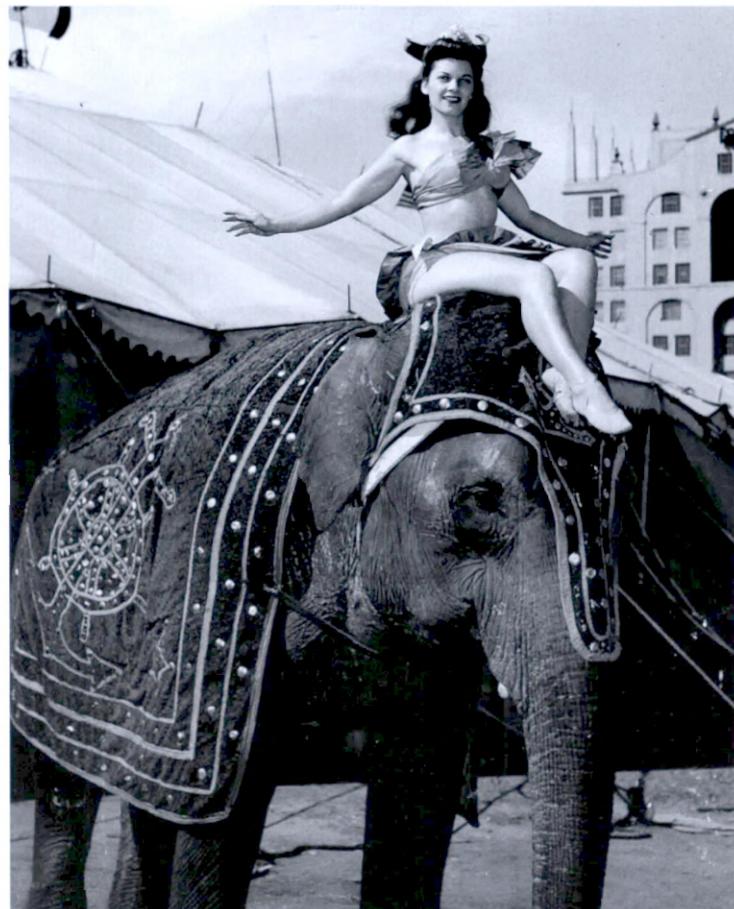
Truth be told, Connie's circus career didn't end with the close of the season at Miami on November 22, as the author implied in her book. The 1943 Ringling-Barnum route book listed "Constance C.

Clausen" as one of the performers.

The Cristiani family, on the other hand, was not on the Big One in 1943. They spent the winter of 1942-43 in Manhattan, practicing for a Broadway play that never materialized. They were assigned to Robert Ringling's Spangles, the Continental Circus during the summer of 1943.

Neither Pete nor Connie seemed to have lost sleep over the end of their teen romantic dalliance. It certainly wasn't Pete's first.

As he recently recalled: "I was kind of hung up on a girl here in Sarasota that was half Indian—Nelida Lightfoot; don't ask me to spell her name. And her father had a printing place—The Lightfoot Printing Company on Central Avenue and maybe a block off Fruitville Road.



Connie rode an elephant in spec on Ringling-Barnum. Note fancy head gear and blanket on bull. Photo courtesy of Michael Clausen Andersen.

"It was a couple years before I met Connie." Cristiani said between sips of coffee. "I was 16 then. And she was a very nice girl... But you know what happens when you go out on the circus, you're gone seven months. So she met somebody else and I met somebody else, and that was the end of it. But we went out for a couple of winters, you know, during winter time. She was a very nice family girl, and I respected her for that. I had sisters, you know."

Pete remained a committed bachelor until he met Norma Davenport, a performer who shared his passion for all things circus, in 1949. They were married the following year and raised four children on the tanbark trail.

For her part, Connie often returned to Sarasota to visit her parents, who in the early 1940s had migrated from Menasha, Wisconsin.



Connie Clausen with circus fan Cliff Glotzbach a few years after the publication of her book. Pfening Archives.

sin, to enable her circus-fan father to be close to Ringling winter quarters activities. In fact, it was during her initial trip to the Circus City in February 1942 that she had a chance encounter with none other than John Ringling North. The circus president immediately

recruited the blue-eyed, blond-haired beauty to ride a parade wagon as Alice in Wonderland during the opening spec. Instead, a switch in production themes placed her atop one of Walter McClain's elephants.

Following her two-year stint on the Greatest Show on Earth, Ms. Clausen spent time in Hollywood promoting movies for Metro Goldwyn Mayer studios.

Returning to Manhattan, she appeared on Broadway and television soap operas and married a TV producer. She subsequently became a publicity agent for Macmillan publishing and started her own literary agency. In the process she was divorced from three husbands.

Connie Clausen died in a Manhattan hospital of a stroke on November 7, 1997. She was 74.

While promoting her memoir in 1961, Miss Clausen was interviewed by entertainment gossip columnist Earl Wilson, who wrote: "Connie adores the crazy circus life—rather, the circus people....

"Her family of a husband, two sons and two step-sons had better be careful or she may tell them: 'I Love You Honey, But I'm Going Back to the Circus.'"

Connie Clausen was on Ringling-Barnum in both 1942 and 1943, making \$25.00 a week the first year, and \$35.00 a week the next. *I Love You Honey, But the Season's Over* was published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston in New York in March 1961 and quickly went to a third printing by May of that year. On the book's acknowledgement page, Ms. Clausen thanked "Arthur M. Concello and Mary Jane Miller for helping me to remember the way it was." The original, which sold for \$3.95 in hardback, is out of print. A paperback reprint was released in 1972. **BW**

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THE LIFE AND TIMES OF WILLIAM PRESTON HALL

PART II

By Bob Cline

A QUICK LOOK BACK

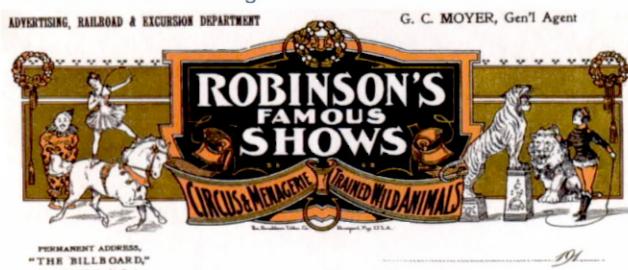
To recapitulate, between 1904 and 1914 William P. Hall bought and sold many circuses and Wild Wests, sometimes getting his equipment or animals back after the enterprise failed. These were undoubtedly the biggest years of his career.

It has been said that Hall preyed off others' misfortunes. However, this is not true. He financed many shows and like any businessman he charged interest and penalties. He was smart enough to know that a deal might not work. Many shows sent Hall their route so he could locate them if necessary. While not every customer was satisfied, they generally returned to do more business. Hall traded with customers when the situation warranted it. Contracts almost always indicated that the payments owed to Hall were suspended during winter when the show had no revenue, but resumed when the show went back on the road.

The horse population of the United States peaked during World War I. It is estimated that there were between 19.8 million and 21 million horses in the United States by 1915. With England only having between 20,000 and 25,000 horses, they needed all they could get. Between the start of the war in 1914 and the entry of the United States in 1917, over one million horses were rushed to the European markets. The American Expeditionary Forces took another 182,000 horses overseas with them.

The use of the horse changed as the conflagration transformed from a charge and attack strategy to one of trench warfare. Cavalry horses became useless to the soldiers. Instead, heavy harness horses were utilized to haul artillery, ammunition, equipment, and medical transports. Hall prospered over the next year because of the demand for war horses overseas. During this time he also supplied horses for the Cape Town, South Africa market. By the end of

Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers bought a number of animals from Hall in the spring of 1915 for their Robinson's Famous Shows. Pfenning Archives.



July 1915, he had fulfilled all his war contracts.

America was also changing. Farm size grew as the number of farmers declined. The automobile began to replace the horse as a means of transportation. Motorized vehicles moved three times faster than horses and left no manure in city streets. Firemen could respond more quickly by not having to waste valuable time harnessing and hitching hoses to firefighting equipment. Electric streetcars replaced horse-drawn ones, and subways, a new form of mass transportation, moved without equines.

America's horse population declined, never to reach pre-1919 levels again. The horse transported circus gave way to one pulled by trucks and tractors in the 1910s and 1920s, just as wooden flat cars gave way to longer steel ones that carried more weight. These trends conspired to shrink the market for draft horses and the antiquated wooden wonders that had made the Hall Farm what it was.

THE HEYDAY YEARS

1915

In 1915, the *Lancaster Excelsior* published an interview with Hall on the first of the year. It mentioned that Missouri mules were sent by ship monthly to South Africa. Many animals were purchased and sold at the Hall farm in early January. One unique addition to the Hall menagerie was a baby hippopotamus. On January 13, the *Billboard* reported that two imported elephants, Helen and Victor, purchased the previous spring, were sold to the Rhoda Royal Show. Hall acquired many elephants throughout his career, all of which were of the Asian or Indian variety. Surprisingly, no records have been found of Hall owning African elephants. Over 350 horses were procured from surrounding areas, transported to the Lancaster farm, and sent out for the war efforts within days.

Later, J. Augustus Jones came to Lancaster to purchase show equipment. He left with three railcars, a few parade wagons, arena iron, seating, and an elephant. Jones had an elephant die on December 31, 1914 and needed a replacement. This elephant appears to be one of the unnamed imports from 1914, although elephant historian Buckles Woodcock attributes the name Judy to the Jones elephant. Con T. Kennedy and John Bachman also came to Lancaster in January to purchase animal acts. At the time, James Babcock was in charge of the shops for Hall. His team of carpenters, blacksmiths and wheelwrights had started to refurbish the Young Buffalo equipment in January of 1915.¹

The Lancaster area was very busy that January. The January 22

edition of the *Schuylerville County Republican* reported, "hundreds of horses are coming and going every day around here." During the third week of January, 176 horses were shipped to the St. Louis market, Art Eldridge returned to the Hall farm, and the Hall buyers purchased eighty head of horses for over \$12,000 in Unionville. Henry Eichmire bought thirty-one head of stock in LaPlata the last week of January.

J. H. Eschman and D. C. Hawn came in late January and bought enough equipment to put out a show. The John A. Haverland circus train records indicate that the J. H. Eschman Circus traveled



In 1915 Hall leased five elephants, named Diamond, Lizzie, Boo, Alice and Annie, to the ill-fated Barton & Bailey Circus. When the show closed in Montana during the summer, the elephants were shipped to the Hugo Bros. Modern United Shows. Don Carson collection.

on seven cars in 1915: one advance car, two stocks, two flats and two coaches. *Billboard* announced that Eschman bought a fifteen car show which wasn't quite true; however, it was purchased from Hall. During the last week of January Hall filed five different lawsuits in the Schuyler County courts against the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad and the Wabash Railroad for fire damages and delays in shipments which caused damage to the horses that were loaded and awaiting transport.

While Hall was a fair horse buyer, he wasn't the only buyer in the trade. The sales he attended also had buyers from the Chicago, St. Louis, and other markets at all times. However, Hall's consistent demeanor, dress, attitude, fair prices, and courteous treatment of the sellers allowed him to continuously work his magic from sale to sale, year to year. Many sellers looked forward to his next visit. Hall was an advertisement all his own. When people met him they knew they had met a man of unusual character who knew horses inside and out, and who had built a legacy over almost thirty years. Hall made use of the newspapers by passing bits of information to them, which constantly kept his name in the news. To avoid costly advertisements, he had placed announcements of his next location in the newspapers.

When February arrived, the horse trade had grown so much that Hall was double billing in two towns every day. In addition to himself, he sent Bert McClain, Eichmire, and Pete Keller out to rapidly hit as many markets as possible. Not every horse was bought. Draft horses started to replace the cavalry horses used for the war effort. The heavies were too large to transport so they purchased 1200 pound to 1400 pound horses and loaded more horses on the boats to maintain the same total weight for the load.²

At least nine to ten carloads of horses were shipped every week to the war effort in the fifty to sixty foot wooden stock cars the rail-

road owned which carried about twenty-five or twenty-six horses each.

Two elephants and a black bear arrived in Lancaster the first week of February. The elephants were named Josky and Trilby, later identified as Wallace Trilby. The Schuyler County Court session began in the middle of February. The fire claim against the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad was dismissed. The two suits against the Wabash Railroad were awarded to Hall, while the two remaining suits against the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad for damages were continued.

The A. B. Miller's Greater Shows leased a stage coach and a calliope from Hall in March 1915. The show requested that the equipment shipped as soon as possible via the Wabash Railroad.³ Louis J. Heath was framing a new carnival and show in 1915 as well. He bought a couple wagons from Hall.⁴ In early March, the *New York Clipper* reported that James Patterson had recently bought five elephants, which were expected to arrive in Paola later the same week from the Hall winter quarters. Because Patterson bought the Gollmar Bros. Circus elephants in 1916, this report suggests that Patterson leased the elephants from Hall in 1915.

William Barton of the Wyoming Bill's Wild West Show wintered his show at the Hall farm and began to re-organize it into a fifteen car show. This would eventually go on the road as the Barton and Bailey Circus. To raise money, Barton sold Hall two train coaches, a calliope, a tableau wagon, and twenty-one horses. All the horses were branded with an "H" under their chins. This brand indicated that the horses had been sold by Hall previously and were later repurchased.⁵ Two Asian elephants, Chief and Trilby, were sold in March to the Honest Bill Newton Show.

During the first week of March, one of Hall's horse buyers, Pete Keller, sold his residence to Hall because Keller was considering moving his family to Illinois.⁶ The R. Z. Orton Circus purchased a female Asian elephant, Juno, in the spring of 1915. The horse traffic remained heavy throughout the springtime. Several buyers were in town on March 7 and 8. Twenty-four cars of horses arrived in Lancaster during these days, twenty-one of which went right back out. Several hundred war horses were shipped out.⁷

In April, Hall bought land from the Burkland brothers for \$125 an acre. This land was named the Bunch farm and adjoined the Hall Farm, aiding its expansion.⁸ At the end of April, a large elephant arrived in Lancaster from England and shipped directly to San Francisco where it was displayed at the Panama Exhibition. Hall leased and sold many other elephants during this month. Queen and Wallace Dutch were leased to the Yankee Robinson show. Duchess was sold to the Howe's Great London Circus. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus bought one male Asian elephant, Little Diamond, and three female Asian elephants, Josky, Jenny, and Wallace Trilby, from Hall for \$10,000. Payments were made in installments throughout the season.⁹

Dan Robinson took Robinson's Famous Shows out in 1911 but never finished the season. By 1915, Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowlers resurrected the title and took the title back on the road. They too, came to Hall for animals, buying two kangaroos and one puma, for which they sent a check on April 9. On April 14, they sent another check for five cockatoos, two monkeys, and two pumas.

As the circus season rapidly approached, show personnel arrived in Lancaster to prepare final details. Because so many show people were gathered together, meetings were held at Dockworth's Drug

Store. Those who attended these meetings included Hall, Tom Weidemann, Doc Allman, John Barton, Mart Goodwin, Paul Johanning, Fred Kirby, Jim Irwin, Tom Tucker, and many others.¹⁰

Andrew Downie had done horse business with Hall in the past and consummated another deal this spring. In a letter to Hall dated April 26, Downie complained bitterly about the quality of the horses he received.

Nearing the end of April, the Farmer's Institute speaker for the Missouri Board of Agriculture, J. Kelly Wright, visited Hall. Wright was creating a new presentation for a lecture called "Missouri, Illustrated." After he visited with Hall, Kelly spoke with the press and was convinced that Missouri was truly the "Elephant State."¹¹

In May, the Jones Bros. Circus bought horses from Hall. J. A. Jones was in Lancaster in April to exchange seating he had purchased in January. The remaining claims against the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad were settled in favor of Hall; the railroad paid for all losses. McClain was out shopping for good horses in Clark County in early May, spending \$12,000. A baby camel was born at the farm.

The improvements to the Hall properties continued in June of 1915. Hall elected to pipe water from the Bunch pond to all of his barns. This eliminated running one to three water wagons every day. Hall had a street crossing constructed at the farm from his office to Mrs. Minnear's property.

Joe Nugent, the well-known horse buyer from St. Louis, came to town on June 6 to purchase several more carloads of horses for the English government. The Allman Bros. Big American Shows was now advertised as moving on twenty-two double length, all-steel railroad cars. They were paid for in installments of \$50 to Hall; however, it is uncertain what the payments were.¹²

In a letter to Hall on June 3 that included his payment for horses purchased the previous month, J. Augustus Jones mentioned that he had not heard from Hall. He reported he had a fine show and was really hoping Hall would come see it. In closing he wrote that he had heard some bad things from the Barton & Bailey show. He closed by expressing the hope that Hall had gotten over his cold and was doing better.¹³

Because Hall leased show equipment, he was sometimes listed as one of the owners. This caused problems when lawsuits were filed against a show. Such was the case with the Barton and Bailey Circus when injunctions were filed for non-payment to the performers. Listed as owners were Thomas Weidemann, manager; John A. Barton, Harry Bailey and Mike Kahn, co-partners; and Hall, as the owner of the show. Hall's personal friend and attorney, Walter Higbee, was summoned to straighten things out in Ogden, Montana. After meeting with all the parties involved, he was able to get the show moving again.¹⁴

Hall purchased the Mark Kratzer residence in Lancaster during the first part of July. During the week of July 22, he announced in the local papers that he had fulfilled all his war horse contracts. Having sold all that he could, Lou Hall arrived from Cape Town, South Africa on July 26. Louis had departed from Beira, Mozambique and arrived in Philadelphia on July 20.

The Barton and Bailey Circus made it as far as Montana, but was unable to move any farther. Hall sent the circus enough money to return to Lancaster. The show traveled 1700 miles back to Lancaster. The five elephants, Diamond, Lizzie, Boo, Alice, and Annie

were sent back out to join the Hugo Bros. Circus in East St. Louis, Illinois.

Hall repossessed the show for non-payment. Weideman, who had the Young Buffalo show a couple of years earlier, bought a two car show from the old Barton and Bailey equipment. Chautauqua organizers asked Hall to use of one of his tents for the Weaver Park dedication ceremony in Bloomfield, Iowa on August 25. Hall gladly obliged and sent his men to move and set up the tent. However, the organizers didn't allow Hall's men to erect it because they felt he had already been generous enough.

In the beginning of September, Hall resold the Kratzer property to Otto and Aubrey Murfin. Lou Hall went to purchase animals to take back to South Africa. He returned the first week of September with a carload of jacks. During the same time, a puma escaped the Hall Farm. The community was relieved when it was captured and safely back at the farm the next day. Later in September, two camels, two cages, and a flatcar were all sold to Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus.¹⁵ Hall received another large elephant in



Hall supplied the equipment when the Orton Bros. Circus switched from wagons to a ten car railroad show in 1916. The show died on the 4th of July in Mora, Minnesota, and returned to Lancaster. Shown here are the show's sleepers, named after the Orton daughters. The car on the left is the Grace. Pfening Archives.

the middle of September. The local newspapers reported it came directly from London.

One of the old show cars from the train sidings was moved to the Hall farm in the middle of October and made into his onsite offices. The horse trade was still very active. In the middle of October, Charles Decker accompanied a carload of horses to Philadelphia. *Billboard* mentioned the activity at "Hallville" in its October 30 issue. Workers started repairing and repainting for next season already. Even the barns were being painted red and white.

In November, Hall purchased a new eight cylinder Cadillac. Keller bought a number of heavy horses for Hall in Memphis, Missouri in November. Hall purchased the large brick building on the north side of the square during the third week of November as an investment.

On November 6, the owners of the Orton Bros. Circus came to town to look over circus equipment. The Ortons had made the decision to switch from a wagon show to railroad movement. They bought railroad cars and enough equipment to take out a ten car show and enlarge their show into a three ring operation.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the decision to switch to the riskier railroad format came back to haunt the Ortons when the show went belly up in July 1916.

Paul Johanning, who was one of Hall's wild animal trainers, had

started his own wild animal show that he toured in conjunction with the Allman Carnival Company. After completing the 1915 season, Johanning sold his wild animal show back to Hall in November. *Billboard* carried the note about the sale in its November 20 issue.

Near the end of the year, show owner J. H. Eschman came to town and bought a number of gray draft horses. He took them back to his winter home in Kansas City and contracted them there until April 1, which kept them working, fit and fed.¹⁷ As he had done in the year past, Shanty Davis returned to take over as head steward in the Hotel Hall.

1916

The early part of 1916 started with a flurry of horse trading in all the surrounding counties and Iowa. During the first week of January, a buyer from the Slonaker barn in Pulaski bought twenty-five good head of horses from Hall. A yak was delivered in the third week of January, which cost Hall \$150 freight. Eighty fine dapple gray draft horses were shipped to Montgomery to the Famous Robinson Shows. Hall, Eichmere, McClain, and Frank Harlan went to the Des Moines area in search for horses. In addition, several hundred head of horses were shipped out of Lancaster that week. Buchanan wanted to enlarge his Yankee Robinson show for 1916. He came to Lancaster because he wanted more trained animal acts. Buchanan purchased a leopard and puma act that had been worked by Johanning the previous year. He also purchased an elephant named Judy that Hall had bought from Frank Ferari.¹⁸ Lou Hall returned from Africa in late January. He departed from Cape Town and arrived in Boston on January 26, 1916.

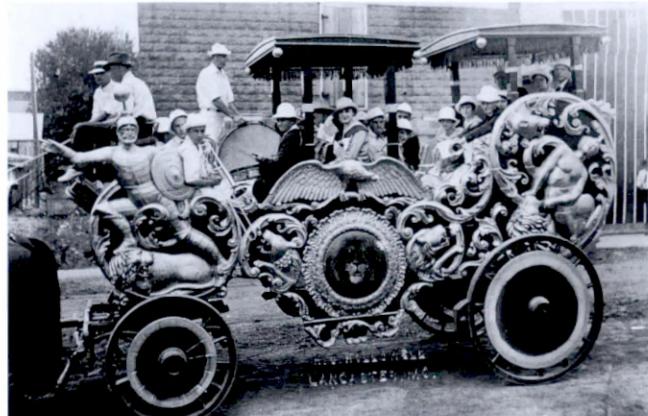
The Orton Bros. Circus was organized in the Chicago area after buying a strip of land near the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad. A large male Asian elephant named Hero had recently purchased from the Honest Bill Shows. The elephant stood ten feet eight inches high and couldn't fit into a regular railroad car. *Billboard* announced the purchase of Hero and also mentioned that the Orton show bought another elephant named Juno from Hall.

Billboard carried a small article called "Hallville" on a couple occasions. The January 29 issue stated that, "Tom Tucker had all the shops running to capacity and that Mart Goodwin, the show painter from the Allman Carnival, was busy at the Hall farm also." Shanty Davis was the head steward at the Hotel Hall where all the Hall employees lived. Hall went to Chicago where he bought a group of animals from the Lincoln Park Zoo along with more railroad cars.

In the beginning of February, Hall put together a twenty car show for a huge party in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. After finally closing an overdue bill, Hall agreed to buy a nine car show made up of two coaches, two stocks, four flats, and one privilege car. The show was owned by United Amusement Company and the signee was John F. Bowne of Bellville, New Jersey. The show had folded in Missoula, Montana the previous summer, was brought back to Lancaster at Hall's expense, and stored at the Hall farm all winter. According to the bill of sale, United Amusement Company bought this show from Hall in April of 1914.¹⁹

Eichmere took a different approach to buying horses. The local newspapers noted that instead of waiting for a barn sale, he drove from farm to farm to purchase stock. This gave a more personal touch to the deal. McClain returned to Lancaster with seven cars of horses.

While Hall and his team were busy looking for horses, customers were coming to Lancaster to browse the horses as well. Five or six buyers came the first week of March. They purchased over 250 head of horses. All of the Barnum and Bailey parade and baggage



Hall provided parade wagons for a 4th of July celebration in Lancaster in 1916. The band chariot pictured here was the finest wagon Hall ever owned. Built by the Fielding Bros. Wagon Company for the Van Amburgh Menagerie in 1868, it was used by the Central Park Menagerie, Howes Great London, Cooper and Bailey, Barnum & London, Barnum and Bailey through 1902. The wagon next surfaced on the Barton and Bailey Circus in 1915, and disappeared forever after being on the Rhoda Royal Circus in 1920 and 1921. Pfening Archives.

horses were shipped to the show's winter quarters in early March. Ollie Turner accompanied the shipment to Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The Orton Bros. Circus moved to Lancaster. The original articles of agreement were drawn up on March 4. They are now at the Schuyler County Courthouse where R.Z. Orton, Criley Orton, Lawrence Orton, Miles Orton, and Bayard Orton joined forces to become the Orton Bros. Circus Company. The original agreement stated R. Z. Orton owned thirty-two shares and all others owned two shares of the company each. The Ortons sold their elephant Juno back to Hall. Before going out on the road a chattel mortgage for the Ortons was drawn up. It stated that if it failed, Hall received the show back.

The now defunct Barton and Bailey Circus owed Hall money. A full account of all notes, loans, credits, and sales was concluded and recorded by Hall's attorney, Walter Higbee, on March 23 in the law offices of Higbee and Mills.

In March, the John Robinson Circus bought an Asian female elephant named Mabel. It appears as if she is one of the unknown imports from 1914; however, she can now be identified. Hall bought the Pres Spurgeon property the third week of March for \$800. The Selig Movie Studios sold Hall four of its elephants, two male Asian elephants named Albert and Toddles, and two female Asian elephants named Mary and Katie.

The Orton Bros. Circus had barely gotten their season under way when the large male elephant Hero went on a rampage. He was subsequently destroyed on May 15, 1916 in Elkton, South Dakota. The Hugo brothers enlarged their show for 1916 and changed its name to the Coop and Lent Circus. Hall leased four elephants to the Coop and Lent Circus, Albert, Mary, Katie, and Juno.

Lou Hall arrived back in Lancaster to visit his brother for a few days before returning to South Africa. Al Wheeler leased five elephants, Boo, Alice, Annie, Lizzie, and Diamond, for his 1916 season from Hall. A letter from Wheeler dated March 27 stated that he was sending a man to pick up the elephants.

Hall strongly believed in improving his properties. In April, he hired Mart Goodwin to paint the fence at the Hall farm. His masterful artwork brought the full color flare of the circus to Lancaster year round.²⁰ Improvements were made to the newly acquired

Keller property in April. A large elephant, Tillie, arrived from New York City on April 21. The Wortham Carnival bought a considerable amount of show equipment including Tillie.²¹ The *Lancaster Excelsior* reported many horses had been sent to various circuses including Ringling Bros.

The Allman Carnival wintered in Lancaster for a few years. In an April *Billboard*, Doc Allman offered to sell his entire operation. Included was a baby elephant that stood fifty-two inches high, a private seventy-two foot coach, a box car, a stock car, four fifty foot flatcars, three sixty foot flatcars, two stateroom cars, and one berth sleeper along with wagons and rides.

One of the 1914 imports, Judy, was sold to the St. Louis Zoo for \$3000. A lion was also sold to the St. Louis Zoo.²² Another female Asian elephant, Mabel, was sold to the John Robinson Circus for \$2000.²³ The wooden elephant that was on the top of Hall's railroad coach office was erected the second week of May.²⁴

Al Campbell was in town to conduct business with Hall the second week of May. Eichmere purchased twenty-four good horses in early May. Matt Walsh bought six horses at Doke's Sales barn in Bloomfield, Iowa. Hall continued to improve his properties. He hired Spencer Mitchell and Luke Meara to modernize his home. Marilyn Foreman of the Schuyler County Historical Society explained that the original house did not have a porch. It was this 1916 renovation that the porch and the car port area to the right side of the house were added.

Many cars of horses continued to be shipped out of Lancaster in early June. The Orton Bros. Circus ended up being unsuccessful on the road. The show was closed by July 4 in Mora, Minnesota. Hall paid the freight to have the show returned to Lancaster and held a sale in August to disperse the equipment. Hall paid \$11,000 to get the show back in his name. This meant that the Orton's owned a good bit of it and that they lost the show on the little bit that they owed Hall.²⁵

Lancaster had a huge July 4 celebration. The festivities began in the morning with a large band concert in the courthouse yard while the massive parade assembled and prepared for an eleven o'clock step off. Hall was second in line in his buggy and tandem of horses. He was followed by a circus bandwagon which was pulled by six black horses adorned in new harness purchased by Hall for over \$1000. The bandwagon was red with brilliant gold leafed trimmings and a canopy on top. The merchant floats were followed by some of Hall's camels, a tableau with clowns on the top, a beautiful bandwagon pulled by two elephants hitched tandem, and a magnificent steam calliope. The celebration continued throughout the day and included the Allmann Bros. Carnival's Ferris wheel and merry-go-round.²⁶

The Barnum and Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth got close to Lancaster when it played Centerville, Iowa on August 5. Hall went there and sold them twenty-three baggage horses. He returned with nineteen horses from the show. Hall walked away with four fewer horses, but made \$5000 on the deal.²⁷ He found every angle he could to keep his animals working at all times. His elephants were on the fair circuit on many occasions. He promised to have an elephant and several different animals in the local fair in Keokuk later in September.

Jerry Mugivan dealt with Hall for many years. In September 1916, Hall shipped horses to Howe's Great London Shows and allowed them to choose which horses they wanted. The Howe's show returned the other horses to Hall, sending him a check for \$1050 for the seven horses they kept.²⁸

The Barrett and Zimmerman horse trading company in Minnesota got involved in another circus when they became the owners of the Fowler and Clark Dog and Pony Circus. Previously owned by Fred D. Fowler and Carl H. Clark, Barrett and Zimmerman presumably had a mortgage on the show and called it in. They advertised the complete show for sale in the September 30 *Billboard*, listing forty ponies, trick mules, wagons, a seventy foot tent and one forty foot middle, seating, lights, and other equipment plus forty head of baggage stock. The November 18 *Billboard* announced that the Barrett and Zimmerman had sold it to Emmett Mark. He had already named the new show the E. Z. Mark Show and had contracted for more wagons, horses and elephants for the 1917 season.

The horses continued to move. Twenty carloads of horses shipped from Lancaster in October. In December, Hall entered into conversations with the Ringlings about getting more elephants. Charles Ringling wired back to Tim Buckley and told him to inform Hall that they had two elephants, Jenny and Nellie Lockhart, which they could sell for \$4000 cash. Buckley wrote to Hall on December 16 to inform him of the offer. Jenny and Nellie were from the famed Lockhart elephant act that came from England and performed on the Ringling show from 1896 to 1902. Hall replied on December 18 and said he would have twenty fine dapple grey horses that he could trade for the elephants. They would be as good as cash and were as fine as any in America. It is believed that the Ringlings did not take the trade; however, Hall acquired the elephants the next spring.²⁹

1917

In 1917, very little information appeared in the local newspapers about Hall. A self-promoter his entire career, in the past he was meticulous about informing the press who visited him, bought from him, and the quantities of stock he purchased and sold. Due to the lack of coverage, it is possible that Hall discontinued his self-promotion efforts or local newspapers no longer desired such details.

During the off season, a female Asian elephant, Gyp, was sold to the Sun Bros. Circus from Macon, Georgia. Hall also sold two other Asian elephants, Katie and Billy, to the Yankee Robinson Circus. J. E. Henry came to Hall a few days before his show opened to purchase a few animals. He bought a large male Asian elephant named Toddles, a double humped camel named Lu Lu, a pair of lion cubs, a large black bear, and a cage full of birds.³⁰ Later in February, Hall sold the Higbee property to Shepherd and Lee Atterbury

In 1917 Hall sold the R.T. Richards Circus the five elephant act that had appeared on Barton and Bailey in 1915. The Richards show, a combination truck and horse-drawn enterprise, was owned by Richard T. Ringling, son of Alfred Ringling. The elephants are seen here in a Richards parade at Adams, Massachusetts on June 16, 1917. Frank Farrell photo, Pfening Archives.



for \$100 an acre.

In March, one of Hall's lion trainers fell while working with the big cats. Fortunately for the trainer, other people on the scene drove the animals away before any serious injuries were sustained. Very little information exists pertaining to Hall's animal acts, including names of trainers and the animals involved.

The continued success of the horse business was briefly mentioned in the local newspapers during the first week of April. One note stated that twelve cars of horses were shipped out of Lancaster that week. Another note showed business was progressing when it mentioned that, "ten to twenty cars of horses were leaving here every week."³¹ The wooden stock cars held an average of twenty-six horses per car. Therefore, it is realistic to believe that Hall shipped over 500 head of horses a week to his various customers. A letter in the Hall Papers indicates that the DeVaux Greater Shows, a carnival, shipped a camel to Hall in March. It is uncertain if Hall bought the camel or received it in trade.

Hall received recognition throughout America for his skills and knowledge of the horse and mule trade and for his circus operations in other venues. Newspapers and magazines found the Hall story one of such intrigue that his success gained national attention. The *Brooklyn Eagle* carried a fascinating article about Hall and his horse and circus operations on March 4, 1917, containing details about when and who Hall purchased horses from.

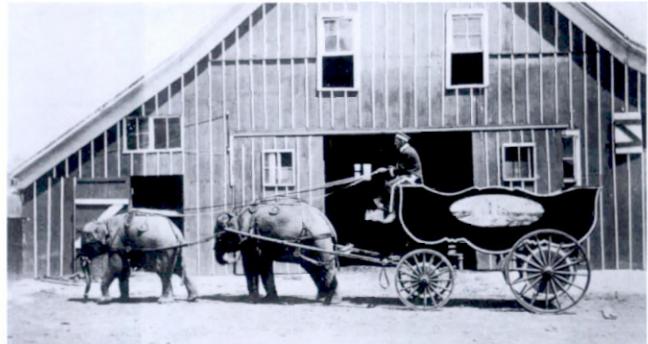
Hall was contacted about the availability of a calliope for a newly framed circus out in New Jersey. Soon after, Hall had a calliope shipped to New Jersey for the newly organized R. T. Richards Circus. The owner was Richard Ringling, son of Alf Ringling of Ringling Bros. Circus fame. Alf Ringling sent a check to Hall for \$132 to cover the expenses of shipping the calliope out east.³² Hall also sold the R.T. Richards Circus five Asian elephants, Boo, Diamond, Alice, Annie, and Lizzie. These elephants had been performing together since Hall purchased them in 1915. Records indicate that this group was the only act of five elephants ever assembled at the Hall stables. It appears all other pachyderm acts produced at Hall's consisted of three or fewer elephants.

The circus has always been susceptible to calamity. Vulnerability to the weather and mechanical failures were some of the dilemmas circuses faced. On May 12, 1917 tragedy struck the Coop and Lent Circus. A railcar caught on fire and took the lives of Albert, Mary, and Katie, three of the four Hall elephants leased to the show. The combination of oil lamps, sparks from trains, and the hay and straw used in bedding created a major disaster every time a fire broke out. When Hall leased the elephants to the Coop and Lent Circus, he included a clause in the contract that provided restitution if anything happened to the elephants. The Coop and Lent Circus owed Hall \$8000 for the loss of the elephants and entered into another agreement for the lease of more elephants.³³

Hall needed more elephants quickly. He called the Ringlings to see if their elephants, Jenny and Nellie Lockhart, were still for sale. The elephants were still available and the offer stood at \$2000 per elephant. Hall purchased Jenny and Nellie Lockhart and had them shipped directly to Titusville, Pennsylvania to join the Coop and Lent Circus. His investment in these two elephants began to pay off immediately.

The Bernardi's Greater Shows, a twenty car railroad carnival, bought animals and equipment from Hall. The March 2 agreement stipulated that payments were to be made directly to the Schuyler County Bank.

The Yankee Robinson Circus leased another Asian elephant, Queen, in addition to Katie and Billy, the two they previously purchased from Hall. Fred Buchanan wrote a letter to Hall dated July



Elephant man Al Langdon driving Billy and Katie at the farm in 1918. This bandwagon was built for the Indian Pete Wild West in 1911 by the Beggs Wagon Company in Kansas City. It was on the Perry Bros. Circus in 1925. Pfening Archives.

1 from Bainsville, Montana that explained that Queen had unexpectedly died and he was in need of another one.³⁴ It is unknown if Buchanan received another elephant from Hall or not.

A shipment of horses was sent to the John Robinson Circus in Quincy, Illinois on Monday August 19, 1917. At this point, Hall owned a large herd of elephants. Three of Hall's big elephants were part of the fair's entertainment in Memphis, Missouri in August. The Coop and Lent Circus folded in mid-season. The three elephants, Barnum Ruth, Nellie Lockhart, and Jenny Lockhart, along with their trainer, Al Langdon, all went over to the Cook Bros. Circus, owned by D. C. Cook, to finish out the season.³⁵

During 1917, the Honest Bill Show faced financial difficulty. It still owed Hall a note for lions purchased the previous winter. On August 16, they contacted Hall to inquire about returning and exchanging goods in order to eliminate their debt. The Honest Bill Show offered to return the original lions and give Hall a spotted horse, props, the arena, and a net in exchange for the original note and interest. At the end of August, the LaMont Bros. Circus, a wagon show, came to the Lancaster quarters after it ran out money. The owner, C. R. LaMont, was suffering from health problems. By September 6, the local newspapers reported that Hall bought the forty wagon show.

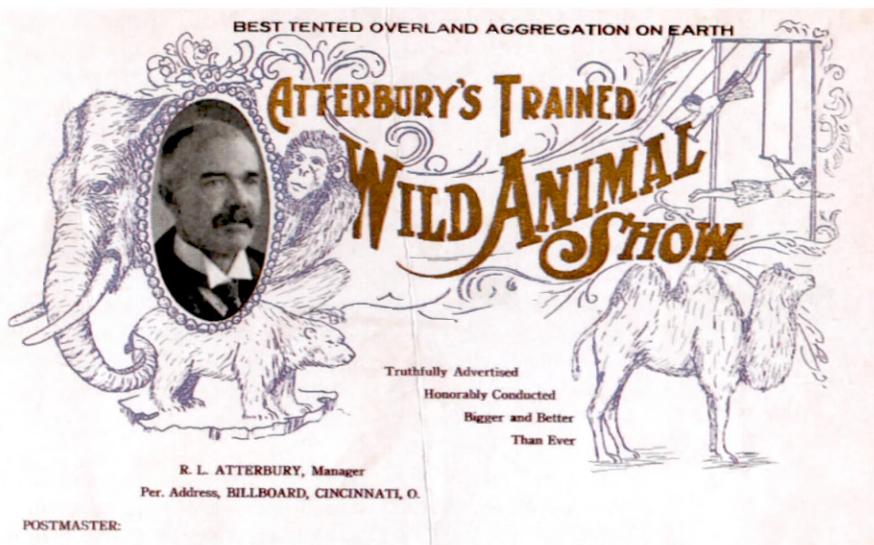
In October, Hall filed three separate law suits in the circuit court. One was against the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad for damages sustained to horses, including a decrease in value due to a delayed shipment. Another was brought against the Wabash Railroad for similar damages. A third was filed against the Mason Novelty Company asking for a replevin for unpaid notes to Hall.³⁶

Mugivan and Bert Bowers of the John Robinson Circus sent Hall a letter in December offering five elephants, Mama, Topsy, Ding, Mabel, and Lucy for sale. Lucy came from the Wortham Carnival and Mabel was previously purchased from Hall. They also had about fifty draft horses and fifteen saddle horses for sale. They asked Hall to "please make us an offer."³⁷

1918

Lou Hall returned from Cape Town, South Africa the last week of February. Based on previous visits, one can deduce that he returned to South Africa with stock soon after his arrival. John Barton, former owner of the failed Barton and Bailey Circus, had been steadily paying his debts to Hall. In a signed note dated February 27, 1918, Barton liquidated and paid in full all debts, claims, and demands to Hall. This is the only debt paid in full found in the Hall Papers.

In early 1918 Hall continued to pay for the LaMont Bros. wagon



Robert L. Atterbury bought the elephant Diamond and leased Alice from Hall in 1919. At the end of the season he brought his show into Lancaster for the winter. Pfening Archives.

show, which he purchased the previous year. A sales slip typed on a LaMont Bros. America's Greatest Shows letterhead dated March 28, 1918 states "Received of Wm. P. Hall \$1000 part payment on \$3000 note." It is signed by C. R. LaMont.³⁸ Another letter, dated May 28, acknowledged the receipt of another \$1000 from Hall and figured the interest was \$400.

H. W. Campbell's United Shows, a twenty-five car carnival, purchased of some wagons from Hall. In a letter dated May 28, the Campbell show asked if the wagons' wheels could be removed prior to shipment and placed inside the wagons to save on freight and keep them from being lost. The Campbell carnival offered three rides and fifteen shows, typical for the time. It wasn't until the mid-1950s that most carnivals had more rides than shows.

Hall bought an elephant named Lucy from the John Robinson Circus. It is uncertain when he purchased her. Hall sent Jenny and Nellie Lockhart to the Yankee Robinson Circus. The group of five elephants that Hall sold the previous year remained with the R.T. Richards Circus in 1918; however, its season fell short. One of these elephants, Annie, was sold back to Hall immediately after the show folded. The other four remained with Richard Ringling until early 1919 when he sold them back to Hall. On July 20, Hall gave Annie to the Henry Vilas Zoo in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Muggins was a young male Asian elephant that Hall bought from the Sells-Floto Circus. Hall didn't have him in the barns very long before he sold him to Rhoda Royal.

Charles W. Cook and his wife, Eva E. Cook, sold twenty-five acres of land in Jackson, Pennsylvania to Hall for \$800 on August 1, 1918. Although a copy of the deed exists in the Hall Papers, it is unclear why Hall purchased the property.

Another showman, J. A. Jones, purchased two elephants, Mabel and Ding, who were offered to Hall by the John Robinson Circus in December 1917. Ding and Mabel joined his other male Asian elephant, Tex. Sadly, Jones died unexpectedly in the fall. A letter from his wife confirms she sold Tex, Ding, and Mabel to Hall in

November.³⁹

Hall understood the expenses that came with owning large animals. To insure his animals were properly cared for, Hall hired out his elephants. They mostly worked locally at Shrine Circus dates and fairs, but sometimes traveled to work events such as the Bloomfield, Iowa Fair.

1919

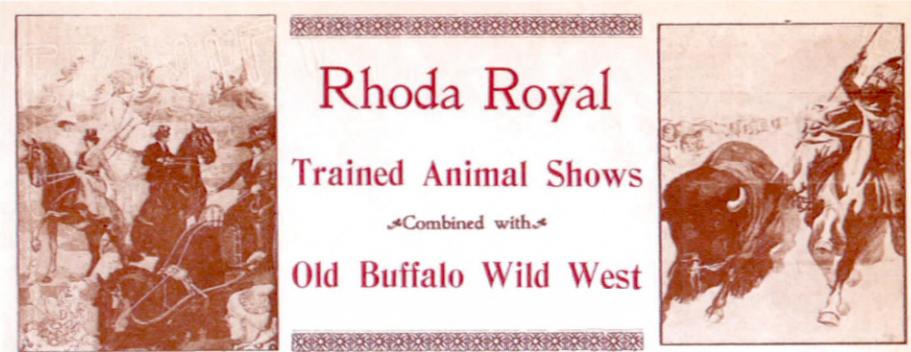
The horse trade continued to be good in 1919. McClain bought horses in Bloomfield, Iowa in February. In March, the local newspapers reported that McClain and Eichmere were out buying horses every day. McClain bought a total of four carloads of horses in Murray, Truro, and Osceola, Iowa. According to advertisements, it wasn't unusual to go to the same sales barn several times in a season.

Elephants were big business for Hall again in 1919. He leased Jenny and Nellie Lockhart, Lena, Lou, and Rubber to the Yankee Robinson Circus. Mabel was leased to the LaMont Bros. Circus, which folded the previous year due to LaMont's poor health. It reorganized and left from the Hall Farm in the spring of 1919. Diamond, one of Hall's male Asian elephants, was sold to the Atterbury Bros. Circus, owned by Robert Atterbury, who also leased Alice from Hall later in June. Ding was leased to the Cole Bros. World Toured Circus. Tex, who was recently bought from Jones's herd, was sold to Honest Bill Newton.

A huge tragedy occurred at the farm on May 2 when lightning struck one of the barns and burned it to the ground. The barn was at the east end of the property. A small building to the west of the barn, which was used as a granary, was also lost in the blaze. Another barn on the west side of the granary also caught fire, but was saved from destruction.

Will Casper lived just east of the barn and was the first person to see the blaze. He called John Keller, Burl Keller, and John Sommer to notify them about the fire. They immediately ran to the building's doors. They used an axe to break the chains off the front doors and pried open the rear doors to evacuate the horses that were stabled in the barn. One horse died from the lightning strike and four others died from the fire. Many others were injured. Hall estimated the damages at \$6000. Unfortunately, he had no insurance because

The great horse trainer Rhoda Royal and his partner D. C. Hawn came to Hall in early 1920 when they decided to enlarge their circus. The year before Royal used this stationery when he sent Hall two checks in payment for unidentified equipment. Pfening Archives.





The Rhoda Royal big show band posed for this group portrait at Ludington, Michigan on May 30, 1921. Pfening Archives.

the rates were too expensive.

Lou Hall returned to Lancaster again on Monday May 25. He left Cape Town, South Africa and traveled directly to Boston where he arrived on May 3, 1919.

After the big July 4 celebration was over, it was time to start clearing the debris from the barn fire. Hall had a large group of men working on the job with the intention of building an even larger barn where the original had been. Hall and his wife, Sadie, signed a mortgage to the Schuyler County Bank on June 6, 1919 providing a piece of land as collateral. Hall normally did not borrow money. However, this loan may have been used to rebuild the barn or for his daughters' education. While Hall made payments on the loan for many years, it was never fully paid back.

Because business was good, Hall purchased another new Dodge touring car in July. Plenty of mules left the Lancaster area in July. Many were sent to Africa for his brother Lou. Hall believed in improving his properties to enhance their appearance and net worth. Seeing the opportunity to enlarge his own home and its amenities, he had a concrete drive poured from the road to the garage.

Rhoda Royal bought the male elephant Muggins earlier in the year for his Rhoda Royal Trained Animal Shows combined with the Old Buffalo Bill Wild West. Royal sent a letter on September 2 to Hall with two checks, one for \$526 and another for \$636, to balance the show accounts. Having paid his obligations to Hall, he asked for the notes to be sent to him in Burlington, North Carolina.⁴⁰

Hall rarely took time off from his business. During the third week of September, before both his daughters, Sydney and Wilma, went away to school in Nashville, the entire Hall family took a trip to St. Louis. After returning, it was back to work as usual. McClain bought the A. A. Justice residence located just to the west of the town square.

As the season ended and animals were returned to the Hall Farm, the Atterbury Bros. Trained Wild Animal Shows returned to Lancaster for the winter. All the animals and wagons were safely stored away from the onslaught of winter.

1920

The 1920 United States census takers canvassed Lancaster on January 5. Hall was listed as a horse dealer and McClain as a horse buyer. A letter from Newton dated on January 7 stated that both of his elephants, Boston and Chief, died. Boston, a female Asian elephant was purchased from the Ringling Bros. in 1910. Hall bought Chief, a male Asian elephant, from the Barnum and Bailey Circus

in 1914. Newton sold one of the hides for \$375 to the University of Oklahoma. In his letter, Newton offered to sell four new one and a half ton Kelly-Springfield trucks. All of the trucks were in prime condition, with next to no mileage and new tires. Newton favored trading the trucks for elephants and other animals if Hall had any interest.

Newton and his wife made a trip to Lancaster in February. While looking the elephants over, Newton was hit by one of the elephants so hard he went flying. According to the newspaper, all was forgiven quickly. Newton ended up shipping a pair of ostriches, two elk, two baby lions, and one elephant back to his winter quarters in Quenemo, Kansas.⁴¹ However, there is a waybill in the Hall Papers for the shipment of two elephants to William Newton, Sr. One elephant was a male, Tex, and the other is uncertain. It is unclear whether Newton bought one or two elephants due to conflicting sources.

Hall advertised to buy horses in Unionville, Missouri the last week of January. Charlie Sparks ordered two new six horse hitches from Hall. When they arrived at winter quarters, Sparks fired off a letter to Hall that said the horses had arrived and were in bad shape.⁴² Mugivan wrote to Hall on January 21, 1920 and said he had four surplus elephants for sale. He also mentioned that if he took a show out again this year, he would come see Hall. Mugivan ended up taking out a show that year under the Howe's title. The *Billboard* listed the sale of three elephants, Alice, Lizzie and Nellie Lockhart, by Hall to the Howe's Great London Circus along with 100 horses in its February 21 issue. It is uncertain why Mugivan had four surplus elephants in January, but purchased three more a few months later.

Hall, McClain, Eichmere, and Ben Hall continued to purchase horses and mules quickly to meet the demands of Hall's customers. Ben Hall bought twenty horses and mules from the Iowa markets in early February. Charles Yates had a span of mules that Ben Hall paid \$400 for. Tom Joiner sold a pair of mules to Ben for \$370. Glen Wallace sold his bay mare to Ben for \$185. Hall returned to Unionville to acquire more horses while McClain shipped three carloads out of Osceola, Iowa. Hall was also advertised that he would be Centerville, Iowa on April 1; Bloomfield, Iowa on April 2; and in Memphis, Missouri on April 3.

Langdon returned from Peru, Indiana on April 3 after taking the three elephants out to the Howe's Great London winter quarters. The Campbell Bros. Circus bought the elephant Lucy. The Campbell, Bailey and Hutchinson Circus leased Ding and Boo and purchased show equipment in April.⁴³ A letter dated April 5 mentioned that Newton bought an elephant, a trained bear, and some horses from Hall. In another letter the same day Newton expressed his dissatisfaction with the horses he had recently purchased. Langdon went to the scales with Bill Newton and A. M. Gregg, a horse and mule buyer from Ada, Oklahoma. They all witnessed the weighing of the horses. Seventeen of the twenty-four horses weighed less than 1000 pounds. Newton gave Langdon \$110 to return home. Newton wanted a check for the money he gave to Langdon and wanted the horse deal rectified immediately.⁴⁴ Hall leased two elephants, Lou and Lena, to the Yankee Robinson Circus again in 1920. Royal and D.C. Hawn came to the Lancaster farm to purchase more show equipment. They bought several parade wagons including one spectacular bandwagon built in 1868.⁴⁵ The horse buying continued through April. Hall visited the horse sale barns in Melrose, Iowa on April 28; Unionville, Missouri on April 29; and Centerville, Iowa on April 30.

On May 15, the Campbell, Bailey and Hutchinson show sent \$100 toward the purchase of equipment and the two elephants that

they were leasing from Hall. They also inquired about a calliope. Ed Heinz of the Heinz Bros. Shows leased a couple of wagons and at least one flatcar from Hall for the 1920 season.

On July 5, Hall received a large male Asian elephant, Toto, from the Yankee Robinson Circus. The elephant was shipped from Des Moines to Glenwood, Missouri where it was unloaded and walked to Lancaster. Toto was soon sold to the Howe's Great London Circus.

Three cars of horses were shipped to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus while it was in the Chicago area.⁴⁶ The August 16 entry in the Ringling Daily ledgers, now in Milner Library at Illinois State University, indicates that the Ringling Bros. were to pay Hall for forty-two horses; however, the transaction was only for \$100. Due to lack of documentation, it is unclear if this was a lease or a purchase.

As the circus season was beginning to wind down, Buchanan put the Yankee Robinson Circus up for sale. Hall bought the entire show, and had it brought to Lancaster from its winter quarters in Granger, Iowa. The Yankee Robinson Circus arrived on Sunday, November 13, 1920. The train included twenty-five cars that carried 150 head of horses, five elephants, forty wagons, sixteen lions, six leopards, six pumas, five tigers, four polar bears, six camels, one zebra, and several ponies. The horses were housed in the two barns north of the square and the rest were in the new barn out east. The five elephants that came with the Yankee Robinson Circus were Babe, Mary, Rubber, Katie, and Billy. The Yankee Robinson Circus was the largest single purchase in Hall's career.⁴⁷

The two car Backman and Tinish Show returned to their San Antonio winter quarters at season's end. With the acquisition of the Yankee Robinson show by Hall, the owners of the Backman and Tinish Show, Doc Palmer, John Bachman, and Al Tinish bought enough equipment to expand their show into the Palmer Bros. Circus.⁴⁸

The Sells-Floto Circus had a huge male Asian elephant named Snyder for many years. He was a prolific breeder who sired five different calves with the show's females. Snyder had a full set of ivory tusks. He was taught to walk on his hind legs by Christian Zeitz. Fred Alispaw and his wife, Lucia Zora, then taught Snyder to carry her on his tusks as he walked on his hind legs. He was a star. On September 13, 1920 that all changed. Snyder left the show grounds, caused a commotion, and was subsequently put down. The Sells-Floto Circus went to Hall to purchase a new elephant. They bought Billy, who Hall had just acquired from the Yankee Robinson Circus. The Sells-Floto Circus immediately changed his name to Snyder.

The Howe's Great London Circus was loaded from its West Baden, Indiana winter quarters and sent to the Hall farm for the winter due to a prearranged deal with its owners, Bowers and Mugivan. The show arrived in Lancaster on Christmas Day. While at the Hall farm, Howe's Great London Circus was enlarged, modi-

fied, repainted, and re-lettered using parts of the old Yankee Robinson Circus. This expanded Howe's Great London Circus into a twenty-five car show.⁴⁹ The Howe's train originally arrived in Lancaster on twenty cars that carried four elephants, four camels, five lions, five sacred cattle, ten monkeys, thirty-five wagons, and 125 horses.⁵⁰

1921

During January, February, and March, the local newspapers took note of the type of horses Hall was seeking, ones 1200 pounds or more and between five and eight years old. Hall spent a day in Willmathsville and Bible Grove. He and Eichmere bought over forty horses during this visit. Hall spent the following two days in Memphis, Missouri and returned there two weeks later. The Memphis sale produced 105 horses, mares, and mules that Hall decided to take back to Lancaster. In March, Hall was in Bloomfield, Iowa where he purchased 142 first class animals. Farmers made a point to bring out their best stock when they knew Hall was in town.

The newly enlarged Howe's Great London Circus started its season on Thursday, March 16. Three of the Yankee Robinson female Asian elephants, Mary, Katie, and Babe, were sold to the Howe's Great London Circus. Louis Roth, the Howe's lion trainer, was in Lancaster all winter training a group of five of the old Yankee Robinson Circus lions. They were becoming a first rate act. As the show traveled out west, the train made a routine stop to check the animals. They found that all five lions were dead. Someone had poisoned them.

The March 24 local papers reported that Mugivan and Bowers were in town. The Palmer Bros. Circus bought the elephant Rubber from Hall. Rubber had been on the Yankee Robinson Circus in 1920. D. C. Hawn, part owner of the Rhoda Royal show, wrote Hall on March 30 to inquire why flatcar #11 had not been shipped. The elephants Ding and Boo were still leased to the Campbell, Bailey and Hutchinson Circus. The Gifford Bros. Model Shows Carnival bought some of the old Yankee Robinson show equipment. Some of the Gifford train, and perhaps other equipment, returned to Lancaster as photos of Gifford coaches appear a group of 1933 pictures taken by Babe Woodcock, wife of William Woodcock, Sr. These pictures are known as the Ralph Hadley set after the circus fan who sold Mrs. Woodcock's images.⁵¹

Louis Ruhe was an international importer of wild animals who had done business with Hall over the years. In the spring of 1921, a young female Asian elephant, Virginia, was purchased from Ruhe. She was then sold to the John Robinson Circus. At the time, Virginia was so small that she was displayed inside a cage wagon on the show. She would later be renamed Burma of the Mills Bros. Circus fame. Hall bought a female Asian elephant from the John Robinson Circus named Tommie. He acquired a full grown male Asian elephant in 1921 that was also known as Tommy.

The Palmer Bros. Circus sent a few payments to Hall. They



The Howes Great London Circus was framed in Lancaster over the winter of 1920-1921 using equipment from Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers's 1920 Howes show and the Yankee Robinson Circus which Hall had purchased late the previous year. Dan Odom (l.), Jerry Mugivan and William P. Hall are shown here, probably watching the show load out to start the 1921 tour. Pfening Archives.

owed him a grand total of \$2930, but were slowly working down their debt. The Heinz Bros. Carnival played Lancaster from July 11-15. They tore down most of the carnival and moved on, but the Ferris wheel remained standing on the Freidrich lot. Many of the wagons were pulled over in the vicinity of the Hall farm. All reports stated that the owner of the Carnival, Ed L. Heinz, was going to take out another show in October called the "Oklahoma Ranch Real Wild West Show."

The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus had finally bought some horses from Hall the previous fall and were in need of more. Hall shipped three carloads of horses to the show while it was in Omaha during the first week of September. The Ringling daily



At 25 cars the 1921 Howes Great London Circus was the largest show to ever leave the Hall Farm. Here the sideshow talker turns the tip as the dancing girls stand behind him. Pfening Archives.

ledgers offer a wonderful insight into this particular transaction. Hall sold the Ringling-Barnum Circus thirty-one horses for \$7,850. In turn, he picked up thirty horses from them and credited the Ringling-Barnum Circus \$2,250. These horses were worn out, tired, and sickly and Hall supplied replacements. The Ringling-Barnum Circus paid Hall \$5600 on September 5, 1921 for the thirty-one new horses. The Campbell, Bailey and Hutchinson Circus returned to Lancaster for the winter, which filled the barns to capacity.

During November, Hall felt it necessary to go to the east coast to check on business in Philadelphia and New York. While heading east, Hall shipped a number of horses to the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Richmond, Virginia on October 18. According to the Ringling daily ledgers, the Ringlings paid Hall \$150.09 to cover the shipping expenses.

1922

The horse business continued to be lucrative in 1922. After being relatively quiet for five years, the local newspapers began to take interest in Hall's activities once again.

During the third week of January, Al Langdon left with two elephants for Shrine Circus dates in Omaha, Nebraska, and Minneapolis, St. Paul, Glenwood and Duluth, Minnesota. McClain and Eichmere visited Downing and Memphis, Missouri in search of quality horses. The following week they traveled to Queen City, Missouri and purchased more horses for Hall.

On February 11, the Ringling-Barnum Circus sent Hall a letter expressing their dissatisfaction with the horses they recently

purchased.⁵² Hall acquired another elephant, named Ena, from the Selig Movie Studios in 1922. He arranged for two more to be delivered in the spring of 1922. Mugivan of the American Circus Corporation wrote to Hall on John Robinson Circus stationary on February 15 about the arrival of the elephants in New York. McClain continued to make his rounds. He secured horses in Van Wert and returned to the Memphis, Missouri stables.

The baby elephants arrived in America in April. Hall purchased the elephants without viewing them. He sold them to the American Circus Corporation who named them Kas and Mo, short for Kansas and Missouri. When they arrived in New York, their destination was changed from Lancaster to Chicago for the Sells-Floto Circus.

Hall often purchased and sold animals so quickly that he never saw them. Later that spring, Hall sold another elephant, Tommy, to the Sells-Floto Circus. He also leased three elephants, Tommie, Ding, and Boo to the Campbell, Bailey, and Hutchinson Circus in 1922.

Hall's talents as a horse and circus dealer were highly recognized. In April 1922 *Collier's Weekly* published an article about Hall's business methods. One practice mentioned was that Hall paid for all his horses with checks, but never logged them to balance his checkbook. Hall was a keen horse dealer and had the amazing ability to see a horse once and remember it years later.⁵³

Hall was expected to ship over one hundred horses to eastern markets in the second week of April. He purchased a female Asian elephant, Jap, from the Ringling-Barnum Circus. Jap performed with the old Barnum and Bailey show prior to the turn of the century. William Hays delivered Jap and a stallion on May 20. A letter states the price of the elephant was \$1200. Hall paid Ringling-Barnum \$1900 and still owed them \$200. Hall sold Jap to Bill Newton shortly after.

W. J. Allman wrote Hall in April and said he had quoted J. George Loss about a baggage car and a couple flats at \$700 each. Since Hall didn't have much money in them, he could afford to give Allman a \$150 commission on each if they sold. Allman had also spoken to someone called Prescott who said he bought the old Barton railroad car, and that Hall owed him \$100 for that.⁵⁴

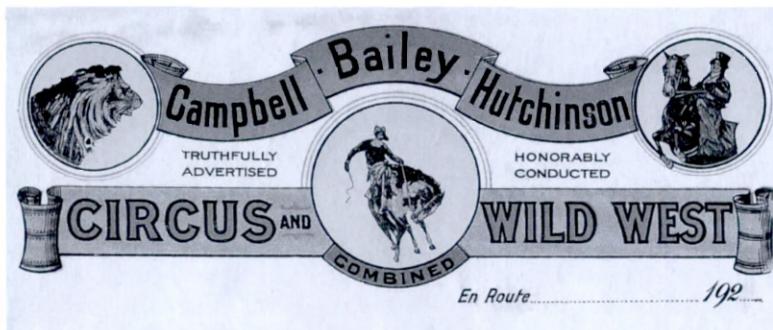
Sometimes it was necessary for Hall or his associates to travel farther than the neighboring counties to do business. In July, McClain took a weeklong trip to Vermont to purchase horses. The demand for horses was so high that a carload of stock was shipped express to Tremont, Pennsylvania for \$499.

McClain continued to travel. He purchased horses in Humeston and Dallas Center, Iowa in September and November. Billy Hall Jr., the youngest of the Hall children, was now attending school at the Missouri Military Academy in Mexico, Missouri.

After Campbell, Bailey, and Hutchinson closed their season and returned Tommie, Ding, and Boo, the Hall farm housed a total of six elephants for the winter.

1923

Hall began 1923 with a business trip in Michigan. McClain bought horses in Corydon, Iowa in January. Langdon was preparing to take three elephants with him for some winter circus dates



The Campbell, Bailey and Hutchinson Circus was a good customer of Hall's. The show stayed at the Hall Farm during the winter of 1921-1922. Pfening Archives.

when one of the elephants balked and ran off. After a small amount of chaos and a quick chase, everything was back under control and the elephants were all safely loaded. Langdon and his charges were slated to be on tour for about four weeks.

In February, a couple of local farmers, Ed Houston and Clarence McMillian, sold seven horses to Hall. The newspapers reported that two eastern horse buyers were guests of Hall's in the middle of February. At the end of February, the papers stated that a shipment of animals arrived in New York; three of the elephants were consigned to Hall. Hall took two of the elephants. One was sold to a circus in Beaumont, Texas immediately, and kept the other one.⁵⁵

Columbia, a female Asian elephant, was purchased from the Swope Park Zoo. In March, Fred Buchanan put together an all new show called World Bros. Circus. He purchased show equipment and a bear, and leased Tommie, Ding, Boo, Columbia, and Ena from Hall for his new show. Langdon accompanied the elephants to the Buchanan quarters. While there, the man who was training to work the elephants left. Ding and Boo began to act up and hit a man so hard they broke his jaw. Buchanan did not want Langdon to leave any time soon.⁵⁶ Hall bought a male Asian elephant named Louis from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. He died at the Hall farm shortly after he was purchased.

The horse business continued to be steady. In March, Hall had approximately 500 horses in house for buyers to browse. The Honest Bill and the Lucky Bill shows, owned by the Newton family, opened in Lancaster on April 28. Jenny Lockhart was sold to the Orton Bros. Circus.

Hall Jr. graduated from the Missouri Military Academy on May 31. One of the buildings Hall owned in town was going to open as the Campbell Creamery in June. The owner, Ralph C. Campbell from Bloomfield, Iowa, was in town looking for an ideal place to expand his business up north. The Creamery would carry ice cream, ice and pop, creamery products and become a distribution point for his wholesale business.

In June, Tex, an elephant with the Honest Bill wagon show, refused to leave Lancaster with the show. Hall hired a man from New York, A. M. Cunningham, to persuade Tex to move. However, Tex did not cooperate. He uprooted a tree and headed north. It took three days to coerce the animal to return to the Hall farm. The newspapers reported that Hall told his men that Tex was a valuable animal and to not hurt him. Once Tex took after Hall, his orders changed to "shoot him boys, shoot him!" Hall's men did not shoot him. Three weeks later, Tex was taken to the train depot and loaded to go back to his owners in Wisconsin.⁵⁷

McClain headed off to New York on business

at the end of June. Sadie Hall took the Hall children on vacation through the eastern states in July. McClain continued to buy horses every chance he could. He visited the Humeston, Iowa area again in August.

In September, McClain went to Las Angeles to meet a shipment of eight elephants. They arrived in Lancaster on September 23 and caused much commotion. Immediately after arriving one of the elephants, Don, broke loose from the chains and took off. The search party grew as Don ran. Finally under a fusillade of bullets, Don was taken down in Appanoose County, Iowa on the McClurg farm about seven miles from the Hall farm. The remaining elephants were named Albert, Katie, Jenny, Mary, Trilby, and Babe. The seventh elephant's name is unknown.⁵⁸

McClain continued to travel throughout Iowa purchasing horses in September and October. In the fall of 1923 Wilma Hall left for work and Billy Hall Jr. entered his freshman year at Stephens College. The World Bros. Circus closed its season and returned to the Hall farm. Hall and McClain went to Peru, Indiana to seek out business opportunities the last week of November.

1924

During the first week of January Hall, Langdon, and Higbee traveled to Memphis, Missouri to conduct business.⁵⁹ McClain was in the western part of Iowa buying horses during the second week of January. The next week, Hall traveled to Centerville, Iowa on business. Newspapers began to publish entries that only stated where Hall traveled rather than why.

William Rowe of New Haven, Connecticut arrived in Lancaster the second week of February and purchased a carload of mules. Hall previously filed a law suit against the American Express Railway. During the third week of February, the case was appealed. McClain purchased horses in Memphis, Missouri the second week of February and returned in March.

At the beginning of March E. Minnich from Tremont, Pennsylvania came to Lancaster to buy another carload of horses. Minnich was a loyal customer of Hall's for years.⁶⁰ Hall turned to Ruhe, the animal importer, in search of more elephants. He bought a half-grown male Asian elephant named George. The first week of March, Eichmere was in the Downing area and McClain was in the Van Wert area purchasing horses. They both shifted to central Iowa for Hall by the middle of March.

McClain traveled to Granger, Iowa in the beginning of April. It is possible that he was conducting business with the Robbins Bros. Circus because it wintered there. Upon his return, he accompanied Hall to Chicago where they looked over some of Hall's business interests. Albert, one of the young elephants imported the previous September, was leased to William Peters for use in a one ring

By the mid-1920s Hall's stationary no longer boasted of him being, "The Horse King of the World." His emphasis on things circus was a reflection of the decline in the heavy horse and mule business. Pfening Archives.

WILLIAM P. HALL

DEALER IN
- CIRCUS PROPERTY, WILD ANIMALS -
HORSES & MULES
HEADQUARTERS, LANCASTER, MO.

circus. The lease was for five months at the cost of \$2000. McClain then left for Galesburg, Illinois to conduct business the third week of April.

Chester J. Monahan took out the Gollmar Bros. Circus in 1924 and 1925. He bought one of the young elephants, Mary, who had been imported the previous August.

While the World Bros. Circus wintered at the Hall farm the prior year, Buchanan used the facilities to enlarge his show. He changed the name to Robbins Bros. Circus. After everything was re-lettered and more equipment was added from Hall, Buchanan leased Tommie, Ding, Boo, Columbia, and Ena. When the time came to start the season, the show pulled out of the Lancaster quarters and traveled just a few miles north to open in Kirksville, Iowa on April 28.

Langdon trained five of the new imports that arrived the previous September all winter long. He returned to Lancaster in May after they performed at the Fireman's Annual Festival in St. Louis. Elvin Welsh and Houston accompanied him. They left two weeks later for a four week stay in Kansas City at the Electric Park.

As Langdon and his troupe of performing elephants and staff returned from Kansas City, Sadie Hall and the Hall children left for vacation to the west coast in the early part of July. They returned to Lancaster on Wednesday July 29. At the end of July, Langdon, his wife, Till and Ed Houston, Welsh, and the five performing elephants left for Chicago to fulfill five weeks of Shrine Circus dates. McClain left for New York with a consignment of mules to go to Cape Town, South Africa toward the end of July. He returned to the Lancaster farm the first week of August. During the third week of August McClain traveled to Creston and other parts of southern Iowa.

In September, McClain left for western Iowa to buy horses. Hall sold a carload of mules to E. C. Eimer from Ashland, Illinois. The shipment was accompanied by "Elephant Jock" Higgins who had just come in from California. Hall went to Chicago the third week of September for business. Peters returned Albert to Hall. He was then sold to Bill Ketrow. McClain left for Atlanta on business on September 30.

Rowe returned to Lancaster in October to discuss the horse business with Hall. He previously bought horses from Hall in February. Langdon, his wife, the five elephants, and his crew returned to Lancaster in the middle of October after having been on the road doing various dates for the previous twelve weeks.

McClain went to Columbus, Mississippi in November and Lenox, Iowa in December on business.

1925

Eichmire traveled to Greentop, Iowa in late January to buy more horses. Hall had many newspaper and magazine write-ups over the years. The *American Magazine* featured him in one in February.

In the beginning of 1925 A. O. Perry of the Perry Bros. Circus bought thirty wagons for his show. Frank Taylor came to town and bought railroad cars and leased two elephants.⁶¹ Hall purchased five Asian elephants, Elsie, Sidney, Wilma, Alice, and Tiny May for \$10,750 from Louis Ruhe.⁶² Sidney and Wilma were named after Hall's daughters.

The World Amusement Service Association came to Hall in March to lease three female tuskless performing elephants for fifteen weeks. The lease began June 15 and included a trainer, W. J. Collins, and a helper who were to remain with the elephants for the duration of the contract. The contract totaled \$3000 with payments of \$200 per week.⁶³ At the end of March, a flatcar loaded with five wagons was prepared to leave Lancaster for the F. J. Taylor Circus.

Buchanan leased Tommie, Ding, Boo, Katie, Jenny, and Babe

for Robbins Bros. Circus. The contract was for \$180 a week rent with the option to buy Katie, Jenny, and Babe at the end of the 1925 season for \$12,000. Ninety dollars a week from the lease was credited toward the purchase price.⁶⁴ Hall bought another male Asian elephant with ivory, Major, from the John Robinson Circus in 1925.

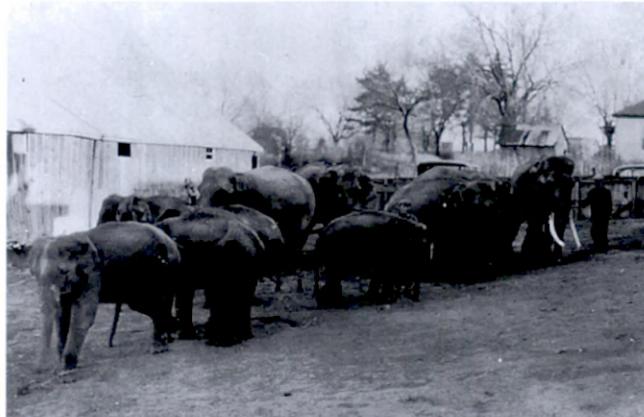
McClain and Hall went to St. Louis near the end of April. They then traveled to New York for business. They were gone for about two weeks.

On July 1 leased a baby elephant, Tiny May, to Newton. Tiny May was a recent import that stood about four feet tall, weighed about a thousand pounds, and was about two and a half years old. The contract stated that for the \$500 rent she could be used only as a pit show attraction. At the end of the contract Newton was given the option to purchase Tiny May for \$3500 with the previously paid money credited against the account. If anything happened to her, Newton had to pay Hall her full value.⁶⁵ This was the standard contract Hall used. In an undated letter, Newton wrote to Hall to tell him that Tiny May died.⁶⁶

Hall began to teach his son, Billy Jr., about horse trading. By July 1925, the boy traveled with his father to various sales for business matters. They went to Omaha on one trip. Three other Asian female elephants, Anna Mae, Nellie, and Tessie, were bought in 1925.

On December 3 Karl Larkin and Shorjiro Uveng of the Della O'Dell Circus and Menagerie sent Hall their weekly payment of \$25. In their letter they asked Hall if he had a female lion for sale. It is unclear what their weekly payment was for.

After Christmas, Hall and several of his men went to Memphis



Elephants at the Hall Farm in 1926. Big tusker Major on right.

for business. On their way, they got stuck in a snow bank. While trying to push the car out, Hall lost the diamond from his ring. He did not find it immediately, so he stationed two men there. After five days of searching in the melting snow, they found the diamond.⁶⁷

1926

In February, A. H. Showbarger, a local saddle maker, worked on a head piece for Ding at the Hall elephant stables. The beautiful head piece was covered with hundreds of brass buttons.

Hall's elephants were put to work regularly on the farm. Aside from the center of the town, most of the roads in Lancaster were made of dirt. The elephants helped pull wagons down the muddy roads in inclement weather.

Hall went to Bloomfield, Iowa in March to buy more horses. Clyde "Highpockets" Baustendal left Lancaster the second week of March with Tommie, Ding, and Boo for Chicago to perform with

a Shrine Circus for dates in Milwaukee and St. Paul.

While in college in Columbia, Missouri, Hall Jr.'s Kappa Sigma fraternity house caught fire. He was able to throw his trunk out of the window and escape unharmed.

Hall wanted to purchase more elephants in 1926. From Ruhe he acquired Little Katie, Little Jenny, M&M (who became Mabel), Sadie, and two others.

Bingo, or Vera, as she was later called, was bought from the Overton Park Zoo in Memphis. Hall also purchased a full grown elephant named Ruth. According to the *Asian Elephant Studbook*, she was born in 1913.

The Robbins Bros. Circus enlarged its elephant herd in 1926 when they leased Tommie, Ding, Boo, Ena, Columbia, Trilby, Vera, Katie, Jenny, and Babe from Hall for the season. Welsh took some elephants on the road for dates while Baustendial took the elephants over to the Robbins Bros. Circus. Langdon and his wife also worked on a circus all summer with some of Hall's elephants.

McClain and Eichmere went to Melrose, Iowa to buy more horses. World Amusement Service Association, Inc. drew up a performer's contract for the "ASA'S Elephants" and the Knight Bros. Circus based out of New York City in July. The contract was for three elephants and three workers from Aug. 26 until October 4. In the contract the three elephants are listed as Katie, Jenny, and Babe, all of whom were with the Robbins Bros. Circus.⁶⁸

Hall went to Chicago on business in August. Hall, McClain and Harry Hall (no relation) were out buying horses in the middle of August.

Hall purchased about 900 acres around Novinger, Missouri from W. F. Cain in order to improve his holdings. There was an existing farm being run by Earl Moyer on the property east of the Bunker Hill school.⁶⁹

Criley Orton came to Hall in November to secure two more elephants for the Orton Bros. Circus. The show had already bought Jenny Lockhart from Hall. On November 4, they reached an agreement to lease Sadie and Elsie for the next three years. The lease fee was \$8,000. Orton was to pay Hall in three installments, the first for \$2000 and the last two for \$3000, on August 1 for the next three years. He also had the option to buy the two elephants for \$8,000.⁷⁰

Hall and Harry Hall bought horses in Iowa again in December. On December 17, Hall contracted with the World Amusement Service Association, Inc. again. The contract was for two acts with three elephants each to work for seven weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1927. The contract was signed by William Barnes, who later was part of the Barnes-Carruthers Theatrical Enterprises. At the end of December, Hall posted an advertisement in the Lancaster papers. It read "looking for horses and mares 1400 pounds and up, 1 to 10 years of age, and mules, 1200 pounds and up, 4 to 8 years old, fat and broke." It also announced that he planned to be at the Rinker's Barn in Unionville, Missouri on Wednesday, December 29.

One of Hall's elephants, Major, received special medical attention for lameness in his front legs. Major was purchased from the American Circus Corporation after he injured his front leg in 1924. He was twenty-five years old at the time. William Woodcock worked him all summer. After returning to the Lancaster barns, Dr. Dave Pearl of McManis College was called to examine one of Major's front legs. It had been swollen from knee to ankle for almost two years. After Hall found out Major had a mixed infection, he had an electrical apparatus designed that Major stood on for therapy. Woodcock was responsible for applying Major's medication and therapy until he was cured.⁷¹

1927

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

The horse trade began to slow down in 1927. Draft horses were becoming less essential to circuses as tractors and trucks replaced them on rail shows, and the trend toward truck-conveyed circuses eliminated the need for them. At the beginning of 1927, one of Hall's best horse buyers, Henry Eichmere, became ill and was put on bed rest.

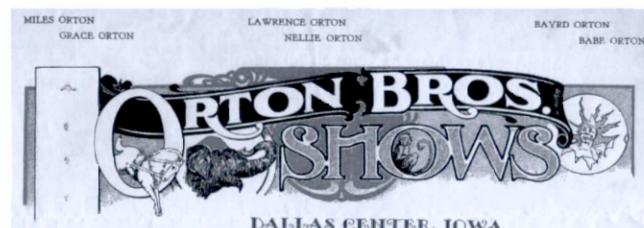
After being sick for a few months, Eichmere passed away on March 3, 1927, at 78 years old. He was born in Minden, Germany on July 20, 1848 and came to America when he was nineteen. He was married to Margaret Kethe. They had nine children together; two died in infancy. Eichmere was buried in the I. O. O. F. Cemetery in Lancaster.

During the Farm and Home Week at Iowa State College in March, E. N. Wentworth, director of the Armour's Livestock Bureau in Chicago, spoke of the storage of large horses in the United States. There were roughly 5 million fewer horses in 1927 than in 1920. Breeders were unable to produce and maintain the number needed to make up for this population decline. Because horses were not readily available, farmers were not able to produce as much food.⁷²

This lack of horse power aided the introduction of tractors and trucks on many farms. Fire departments began to use trucks, which were much faster than horses. Many horse drawn trolleys converted to overhead electrical power. The trolleys were built larger, made less noise, and left less pollution behind. Manufacturing firms also converted to gasoline engines for faster speeds and more powerful torque. These forms of power didn't need to be stabled, fed, watered and cleaned up after. All this changed the horse and mule business.

As the circus season began again, Hall purchased Juno, a female Asian elephant, from Ruhe. Two elephants that were acquired the previous year, Sadie and Elsie, were leased to the Orton Bros. Circus.

The John Robinson Circus sold Hall a male Asian elephant named Toto who had originally been bought from Hall by the Howe's Great London Circus in 1920. Hall also repurchased Mary,



The Orton Bros. Circus leased elephants from Hall throughout the late 1920s. This letterhead dates from 1929. Pfening Archives.

who had been bought by the Gollmar Bros. in 1924, along with twenty-seven camels for \$8500, payable in ninety days. The letter was signed by Bert Bowers.⁷³ George, a male Asian elephant, was leased to R. L. Atterbury. Tommie, Ding, Boo, and Major were leased to the Cook and Cole Circus, owned by Leo Crook and Arthur Hoffman. The show only played twelve dates before it folded. The elephants were returned to the Lancaster barns.⁷⁴

Buchanan's Robbins Bros. Circus was out again in 1927, and leased Mabel, Vera, Columbia, Ena, Jenny, Babe, and Trilby from Hall. Ruth was sold to the Zellmar Bros. Circus. Hall purchased another female Asian elephant, Mona, in that year. He rebought Rubber from the Christy Bros. Circus. Rubber lived at the Hall

farm from 1915 to 1918 before he was sold to the Yankee Robinson Circus.

Langdon and three performing elephants went to St. Louis in May for a one day spot date. In June, Langdon took the act to Chicago for several weeks of fair dates. After many of the business transactions were taken care of around the Hall barns, the Hall family took a trip to Peru, Indiana in late June where Hall did business while the family vacationed.

From August 22 to 25 the Hall elephants worked the Kaheka Fair. Hall leased horses and mules for various types of work including thirty mules to the William O'Neil and Sons Construction Company from Fairbury, Minnesota to work on road construction projects.⁷⁵

The contract with the World Amusement Service Association, signed the previous year, was fulfilled. Hall received \$3500 for the elephants' performances. He promptly turned around and made a \$3000 payment to the John Robinson Circus for the elephant and camels bought earlier in the summer. Hall sold Toto to Bill Woodcock, but Toto died before he received him.

Hall sent another \$3000 payment to the John Robinson Circus which they acknowledged receiving in a letter dated October 24. Hall paid his final payment of \$2500 to them in November. Bowers replied to Hall, thanked him for the payment, and added \$177.67 interest, all that remained to be paid. Mugivan sent a letter to Hall on December 19 asking for the interest check so they could close the deal.

A contract was drawn up in November between Hall and the Midwest Booking Association in which Hall was to provide two elephant acts of three elephants each. The elephants were expected to be costumed with the necessary trappings and paraphernalia for a period of seven weeks beginning the following August 1. In order to distinguish the elephant acts for his contracts, Hall named each group. He offered the Asaw Elephants, Harmon's Elephants, and Pop Hall's Wonder Elephants on the contracts.⁷⁶

On December 3 at two in the morning a house Hall owned and rented to the Wendall Hounsom family burned down. No one was hurt during the fire. Luckily Hall and the Hounsom family had insurance that covered the losses.

1928

McClain had been away from Lancaster since Christmas tending to some business in New York. He returned on Wednesday, January 17. Horses were being bought and sold on a regular basis. The newspapers carried an exceptional amount of horse business news again in 1928. A Charles Flynn signed a promissory note to Hall on January 29 for \$100 to be payable in eight months. It is uncertain what this note was for. The note was on a commercially printed form that only required a few details and a signature. It did not mention Hall, only Lancaster.⁷⁷

One of the most unexpected and devastating blows to the Hall operation occurred on February 3 when Hall's younger brother

Louis James Hall died in Miami.⁷⁸ Lou had been with the Hall enterprises since the late 1880s. He was responsible for maintaining the satellite stations in Richmond, Germany, and Cape Town. After Lou passed, the shipments of horses and mules to South Africa ceased. Lou was born on April 14, 1865 in Missouri. He left behind his wife, Alethia; son, Louis Jr.; and daughter, Lucy in Cape Town. He was buried in Miami.

With a contract dated February 4 Frank Taylor leased three elephants for a period of ten weeks. It had the usual considerations for safe keeping, upkeep, and transportation. An elephant that was not found in earlier documentation, named Tulsa, is included in this lease. Tulsa was listed as a female elephant that stood about five feet six inches tall. It is possible that Tulsa was one of the unidentified imports Hall had recently purchased.

McClain was advertised to buy horses in Wayland and Kahoka, Missouri from March 20-21, and Granger, Le Roy, Corydon, and Promise City, Iowa from March 22-29. A large number of horses had just been bought in Unionville, Corydon, Hurdland, and Omaha, Missouri. All of the horses were paired up, groomed and shipped to eastern markets.⁷⁹ By March 31, McClain had left for Chicago. By the late 1920s, the newspapers were very vague about what was happening at the farm or who it was happening with.

On Friday April 11, Hall and his son stopped in Des Moines to pick up Wilma Hall. She was studying music at Drake University. During the middle of April Billy Hall Jr. and McClain traveled together to buy horses in Iowa.

The Orton Bros. Circus leased Sadie and Elsie to perform with Jenny Lockhart, who they bought from Hall in 1923. Mabel, Ena, Columbia, Trilby, Babe, Vera, and Jenny were leased to the Robbins Bros. Circus. Nine of the Hall elephants were shipped to Chicago to help inaugurate the new Chicago Stadium. They returned to Lancaster on April 22. By May 2, George, a male

Asian elephant, was returned from Taylor and went out on a thirty week contract with the Cook Bros. Circus.⁸⁰

Visitors were not uncommon at the Hall home and farm. In May, Sarah Hall's sister, Mrs. Charles Murrell, and her two children came for a couple days visit. Joe Metcalf, an animal trainer who left Lancaster a few years prior with the Robbins Bros. Circus, stopped by to visit the trainers at the Hall barns. Elvin Welsh left Lancaster with several of Hall's performing elephants to join a circus in Chicago. He was with them for the summer.

In June, six elephants were shipped to Alton, Illinois to be used at a convention. Six other elephants were sent to Portland the same week for another convention.⁸¹ Taylor returned to Hall and negotiated a new contract for a black bear, a spider monkey, a male white camel, and a brown female camel. In exchange for the animals, Taylor signed over the property referred to as "one lot in Omaha, Nebraska called Lot 22, Block 3, Bedford Place addition to Omaha."⁸² Jack Lorenzo of the Gus Sun's Booking Agency signed a contract for a three elephant act with a trainer and a handler in June also.



A natty Bill Woodcock with Major at the farm in 1928, not long after Woodcock had nursed the elephant back to health. Woodcock was one of many elephant trainers who earned their spurs at the Hall Farm. Pfening Archives.

Langdon took one of Hall's young elephants to visit the Schuyler County Courthouse one day during the first week of June. The elephant climbed the front steps and went in the main lobby. She stuck her head in several offices and visited with those working that day.

On June 30 Bill Woodcock, then an employee of Hall's, signed a contract with Hall to lease the elephant Major. The contract allowed Woodcock to have Major for twenty weeks beginning April 25, 1929 and again on April 25, 1930. Once the contract expired and all monies were paid in full, ownership of Major would pass from Hall to Woodcock.⁸³

In July, George Stretch and Metcalf took some elephants to Grant City, Missouri. Spencer Huntley and Guy Wheeler took more elephants to Oregon and Washington to work some fair dates.

On August 1, Hall provided two elephant acts with three elephants each for seven weeks to fulfill a contract with the Midwestern Booking Association signed the previous year. Woodcock took three elephants to the Columbus, Indiana Fair in August for a week. McClain and Billy Hall Jr. went to New York in August for almost two weeks.

Elephants weren't the only rentable animal at the Hall farm. Stretch and Billy Hall Jr. took two camels to the Passion Play for



Two Babes. Sarah "Babe" Woodcock, wife of Bill Woodcock, poses with the elephant Babe at the farm in the late 1920s. Bill Woodcock photo, Pfening Archives.

the Municipal Theatre in St. Louis the first week of September. Welsh returned in the middle of September with the herd of elephants he took out that summer.

Hall and McClain left on Sunday, October 5 for Chicago to spend several days there on business. The Orton Bros. Circus returned Sadie and Elsie. They sold Jenny Lockhart back to Hall on October 10. They agreed to lease Sadie and Elsie again for two more years and signed that contract on October 10 as well.⁸⁴ Hall, his son, and Higbee, who was now a circuit court judge, left for Wyoming on a business trip the day after meeting with the Orton family. They were gone a week.

During the middle of November, three Hall's elephants were loaded in a truck for an exhibition in a winter circus in Peoria, Illinois. Spencer Huntley, Stretch, and Lowell Brown accompanied the elephants. The Barnes-Carruthers Agency offered a contract for 1929 that asked for two separate elephant acts with three elephants in each act for seven weeks.

A letter dated December 12 from the Consolidated Circus Company of Omaha, indi-

cated they were sending a \$400 check for a lease of the animals. It also stated that they were loading the animals. The baggage car was ordered and they asked Hall to call the agent and release the car. The letter was signed by F. J. Taylor. It is possible that the Consolidated Circus Company leased an elephant.

Jenny Lockhart died on December 23, 1928 in Union City, Oklahoma.

1929

The year 1929 began with a simple note in the newspapers that stated Wilma Hall was attending Drake University. On January 8, C. W. Webb of the Russell Bros. Trained Animal Shows arranged and signed a contract to lease the large female elephant, Rubber, until November 22, 1929.⁸⁵ A letter to Hall written in February indicated they were paying \$25 a week rent on Rubber. In the middle of January, the newspapers announced Hall was buying horses at the Rinker's Sales Barn in Unionville and at the stock yards in Memphis, Missouri. He was looking for "horses and mares weighing 1200 pounds and up and between 4 and 8 years old." He also was buying "mules 15 hands high, 4 to 8 years old and fat."

The Schell Bros. Circus, owned by George Engesser, leased a female elephant named Mary for the season. They signed their contract on February 26. Sadie and Elsie were still leased to the Orton Bros. Circus. E. E. Coleman sold Virginia, a young female Asian elephant, back to Hall. Hall originally purchased her from Ruhe as a baby in 1921. Mabel, Jenny, Columbia, Ena, Trilby, Vera, and Babe were leased to the Robbins Bros. Circus.

The Buck Jones Wild West Show folded and was transported to the Hall farm for storage. D. T. Pritchard held the chattel mortgage on the show. While visiting Mugivan, he borrowed \$120 against the mortgage of the Buck Jones Show. In July, when Mugivan found out the show had been hauled into Lancaster, he wrote to Hall and asked if he got the show and received any money. He also wrote to please send him his \$120 that he lent Pritchard. After a while, it became apparent that Hall was stuck with the show.

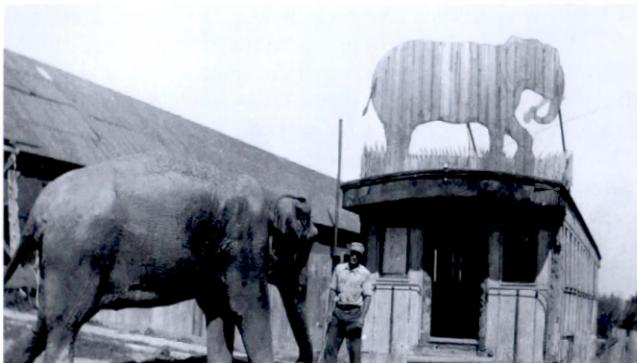
Hall's fields were filled with wagons and train cars. Many were vandalized by children who used the area as a playground.

There is evidence in the Ralph Hadley photos that Hall did business with other shows, including the Litt Carnival and Gifford Model Shows. However, it is uncertain what type of business he did with them.

Barnes-Carruthers came back to Hall in June for a small contract that requested the Asaw elephant act and the Harmon elephant act to perform for a period of seven days. Both acts were to have a trainer and a handler and all paraphernalia required for the engagement.

The Buck Jones Wild West ended up at Hall's after it folded in the summer of 1929. Pfening Archives.





Elephant Blanche and George Stretch in front of the old Hall office in 1933. Claims that this former Yankee Robinson advance car was once part of Lincoln's funeral train are unsubstantiated. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.

ment.

The Schell Bros. Four Ring Circus was on the road in 1929 with one of Hall's elephants. In August, they sent Hall a check for \$375 and reported that they were having good business aside from a week or two that was in a little slump.⁸⁶

Because Hall lived in Lancaster, the newspaper carried other circus news. On September 12 it reported that John Ringling purchased the entire American Circus Corporation holdings in New York. Included in the sale were the winter quarters facilities in Hollywood; Peru, Indiana; Macon, Georgia; and West Baden Indiana. Ringling now owned the Sells-Flo Circus, the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, the Al G. Barnes Circus, the John Robinson Circus, and the Sparks Circus.

In June, a member of the public got hurt during the Barnes-Carruthers contracted dates in the Chicago area. James Hicks sued Hall for his injuries. His settlement was a \$100 payment with a release of all claims against Hall. Hall and McClain bore witness to his signature dated October 7, 1929. The claim was filed in Cook County in Illinois.⁸⁷ In Hall's contracts, there was no mention of any minimum amount of liability insurance required by the performing act.

The economy changed in 1929. On October 29, the stock market crashed, marking the beginning of the Great Depression. Falling steadily, the stock market had its lowest closing ever on July 8, 1932.⁸⁸ Over 4000 banks failed. Economic activity was reduced to small trickle. The economy was in huge disarray.

Hall's business matched the economy for many years. When there were plenty of circuses in the 1910s and early 1920s business was great. Circuses had a terrible time surviving the Depression. Hall's wagon and rail show equipment was no longer in demand. His wagons and rail cars sat idly in fields where they deteriorated and were vandalized. The equipment rapidly lost its value.

The deaths of Eichmire and Lou Hall combined with the financial distress the country faced were all contributing factors to the decline of Hall's empire. In the years to follow, shows stopped wintering in Lancaster. The animals were one of the few income producing assets Hall still held.

Wilma Hall returned home in December for the holidays. She was now attending the University of Missouri at Columbia. Hall had been feeding all of the livestock from the failed Buck Jones Wild West for almost six months when he filed suit against the

owners, the Dell Holding Corporation. The suit was brought to the courts on December 26. This request was for the courts to notify and advertise the Dell Holding Corporation was being sued as they were not residents of Missouri and could not be reached. The sheriff served and executed a writ, but failed to find any of the defendants in his county.

1930

On January 6, Hall and Fred G. Brunk signed a lease for the use of Virginia the elephant, described as "seven feet tall, weighing about 4000 pounds, with two holes and one slit in her right ear and one hole in her left ear." The contract was good from March 1, 1930 through March 31, 1931.⁸⁹

The original writ from December 26, 1929 against the Dell Holding Corporation was presented in court by the legal firm, Mills and Jayne. They asked the court to sell the property immediately. If they waited until the May court session, the property would find no buyers and would lose at least by fifty per cent of its value. The courts had the sheriff post bills to try to locate the defendants, none of which responded. Since there was livestock involved a sheriff's sale was held on February 8. Hall bid \$800 and bought all the livestock, which included seventy horses, one mule, and one long horned ox.

On February 15, the sheriff then posted notice of a pending sale for the equipment. The Dell Holing Company's attorneys sent Hall a telegram to see if Hall was owed money or had any claims. Hall responded that he had bought all the livestock and the remainder would be sold at auction on February 26. With no response from the defendants again, a sheriff's sale was held on February 26. Hall again was the highest bidder. He purchased a seventy-eight foot combination coach, a sixty-six foot sleeper, a Pierce Arrow truck, a moving picture wagon, cookhouse, seating, a stage coach, a gener-



Death row. Robbins Bros. and Buck Jones wagons decay in back field at the farm in 1933. Note rolling Missouri countryside in background. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.

ator, four canvas wagons, and eleven other wagons. Frank Tallman, the sheriff of Schuyler County, turned over the proceeds from the sales of \$1865 to Hall. He proceeded with his suit against the Dell Holding Corporation for unpaid bills.⁹⁰

Hall leased a lot of elephants in 1930. Mabel, Jenny, Columbia, Ena, Trilby, Vera, and Babe were on Robbins Bros. Circus. Mary was leased to the Schell Bros. Circus again. Sadie and Elsie were leased to the Orton Bros. Circus. Katie, George, and Juno were leased to the Gentry Bros. Circus. Mona and a camel were leased to Taylor's Great American Circus. A newspaper clipping from the Burlington, Iowa *Hawk-Eye* mentioned two of Hall's elephants

passed through town in a bright red truck. They were on their way to Indiana to perform with a circus.

The 1930 U. S. Census was conducted in April. Hall's profession was listed simply as "Livestock." McClain was in St. Louis for nearly a week in April. Stretch took three of Hall's elephants with him to Fort Wayne, Indiana. They were scheduled to perform there for most of the summer months.

Billy Hall Jr. accompanied his father to Oskaloosa, Iowa on business on May 14. It is possible that they were buying horses. They then went to Macon, Missouri at the end of June on business.

Buchanan started to feel the pinch of poor business. On July 24, he sold Hall his female hippopotamus. She had a water tank in the basement of the Hall cellar alongside the elephants.

Birney and Tillman Houston took three elephants with them to Cincinnati in July. They were scheduled to be on the road for over three months. Hall sold some of his show equipment to Lancaster locals. Charles Schmid's father bought the Buck Jones Wild West ticket wagon. He used it for a storage shed behind his service station for many years.

Wilma Hall left in early September to move to Brunswick, Missouri to teach.

Birney and Tillman Houston returned with the three elephants they took out the third week of October. They had been doing dates for the Gus Sun Agency. The biggest event to ever happen at the Hall farm occurred in late October when the Robbins Bros. Circus came from Kingman, New Mexico to winter on October 18. Robbins was a twenty-five car railroad show. Every barn was packed to capacity along with the railroad sidings being as full as possible.⁹¹ It is likely that the show was only about fifteen cars at the time of arrival. *Billboard* reported bad business for the Robbins Bros. Circus. They cut ten cars off of their train in mid-season and had it all returned to their Granger, Iowa winter quarters.

The *Lancaster Excelsior* reported on December 11 that the Robbins Bros. Circus moved from Granger to Lancaster. On December 14, show owner Sam B. Dill came to Lancaster to scratch out an agreement for some elephants for his circus next season. The contract was for Jenny, Anna May, Tess, Katie, Juno, and George.⁹²

1931

McClain went on a few business trips to St. Louis in early 1931. The newspapers reported at least one trip every month through March.

The female hippopotamus that Hall purchased from Buchanan was sold to the Swope Park Zoo in Kansas City on February 12. While on the Robbins Bros. Circus, she was called Miss Iowa.⁹³

Prior to the opening of the 1931 Robbins Bros. season, Fred Buchanan came to Hall to make an elephant deal. Buchanan sold four elephants, Margaret, Tony, Trilby, and Ena, to Hall on April 28, 1931.⁹⁴ Buchanan then arranged to lease three elephants, Sadie, Virginia, and Elsie, from Hall for the season. He signed a note to Hall on April 28 for \$3000, which called for Buchanan to pay \$100 each week beginning May 1 and continuing until the full sum



These Buck Jones wagons had seen better days when this 1933 photo was taken. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.

and subsequent interest totals were paid. As a result of these negotiations, the Robbins Bros. Circus went out with nine elephants in 1931.

There is some uncertainty about who owned the elephants Buchanan leased. Between 1925 and 1930 Buchanan bought Trilby and Ena from Hall. He then sold them back in 1931. Margaret, Tony, and Blanche were purchased from Snake King in 1925. There were no elephants included in the chattel mortgages Hall held on Buchanan. It is uncertain if Buchanan owned any elephants outright. There is a possibility that all nine elephants on the Robbins show were leased by Hall. Joining Sadie, Elsie, and Virginia in the previously mentioned contract were Columbia, Vera, Babe, Mabel, Jenny, and Blanche.

The elephants brought in the majority of Hall's income in 1931. He housed thirty-four elephants that year. Mary was leased to the Schell Bros. Circus. Jenny, Tess, Anna Mae, Katie, Juno, and George were leased to the Gentry Bros. Circus. The Pop Hall and Asaw elephants were again contracted out for dates throughout the year. Woodcock, Birney Houston, Welsh, and Stretch worked with the elephants in 1931.

There was no mention of horse dealings in the newspapers during 1931, an indication of that the horse trade was drying up. The mechanical age was taking its toll on the horse industry. Most small circuses had converted to trucks and tractors by 1930 which eliminated the need for many horses. Hall's financial situation was also changing. Hall took out a bank note with the State Central Savings Bank of Keokuk, Iowa on April 27, 1931 for \$4000. Hall didn't

make the first payment until September 15. He repaid \$2250. After two more small payments, the note was renewed for a remaining balance of \$650 on December 8. Fifteen years prior, Hall spent \$15,000 to \$25,000 a day purchasing horses. He was now borrowing money to stay in business.⁹⁵

On July 23 the *Lancaster Excelsior* reported that Higbee, McClain, and Hall Jr. left for Shamokin, Pennsylvania on business. Due to lack of coverage, it is uncertain what type of business they were doing.

The Russell Bros. Circus came to Hall in September of 1931 and leased "one double humped female Siberian Camel, together with



The windows of this Buck Jones sleeper had been broken out by the time this picture was taken in 1933. Note buckled wooden flatcar in front of coach. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.

her male double humped baby camel." The lease was for \$1100 to be paid in weekly increments of \$25. The Russell Bros. were to pay Hall while they were on the road during the 1931 and 1932 seasons.⁹⁶

Hall's cousin, Joe H. Hall, passed away in November while visiting his brother, Ben Hall, in Milton, Iowa. He had twelve siblings.



These Robbins Bros. coaches show significant deterioration after being parked at Hall's for only two years. Note busted windows. Ralph Hadley photo, Pfening Archives.

Joe H. Hall's wife preceded him in death; they had no children.

The Gus Sun Booking Exchange Company leased three elephants, Nellie, Mabel, and Alice, from Hall for the winter months. The lease was for \$300 and included a trainer and helper. The Sun agency was to pay for the transportation and care, as well.⁹⁷

In a lawsuit against Hall's cousin, Ben Hall, the United States government tried to collect a tariff of \$3,049.48 for a diamond that Ben brought into the country seventeen years earlier. Ben Hall bought a diamond in Hamburg and had it mounted into a stick pin which he then wore on his clothing. He did not declare that it was imported when he went through customs. Ben Hall's attorneys proved the diamond was bought in 1896 when he was in Germany and not in 1915 as the government claimed. The judge agreed with Ben Hall and proclaimed the government's case null and void.

1932

While the local newspapers didn't cover Hall in 1932, cancelled checks, letters and contracts tell a lot about his operation that year. Through the checks it is evident that the Schuyler County Bank and the Bank of Lancaster were both used. The checks are all signed by the Hall Company with an occasional additional signature from Hall, Hall, Jr., or McClain.

The normal procedure for purchasing stock was to write the seller a check. Through the cancelled checks, it is clear that the horse business had not completely died out, although business was nothing like it used to be. The only surviving checks were written in August and September 1932, after Hall's death.

The Robbins Bros. Circus wintered at the Hall Farm during the off season. Hall realized that Buchanan wasn't going to pay him what he owed. On February 8, Hall filed a law suit against Buchanan for the sum of \$9730 for non-payment. The sheriff attached all of Buchanan's property which included nine camels, a private coach railcar, one advance car, one roan mare, three geldings, one bronco mare and a calf, a hippopotamus wagon, a light wagon with lights, and three floats.⁹⁸

The sheriff's sale was held at the Hall farm on February 20, where everything was available for viewing. Hall was the only bidder, purchasing everything for \$400 cash. The money was turned over to Hall toward the suit against Buchanan. Buchanan still owed

Hall nearly \$9000. Prior to 1932, it was uncertain who owned what in the Robbins Bros. Circus. After the sheriff's sale there was no doubt that Hall owned everything.

Dill, of the Gentry Bros. Circus, previously leased elephants from Hall. He returned in February to work out another lease for the 1932 season. He leased Jenny, Anna Mae, and Tess. All were described as 3000 pounds and five and half to six and half feet tall. Dill also received his choice of one of Hall's trainers for an additional \$25 a week. He had to provide board for the man as well as care for the elephants. The contract required a \$1000 deposit that would be returned at the end of the season if the elephants were well cared for.⁹⁹

On April 21 the newspaper reported that Hall had been ill since March and was slowly improving. Elmer Shafer and Cook from Pennsylvania, visited Lancaster to buy horses in April. The American Circus Exhibition contracted with Hall in April for three separate elephant acts with three elephants in each act. The circus was in Milwaukee from May 7-14.

Charles S. Hatch of Los Angeles leased three elephants, one male trainer, and one female performer on May 4 to work nine days of fairs in California starting in June. Although the contract is signed "W. P. Hall," it clearly is not his signature. Schell Bros. Circus once again leased Mary for their season.

It is possible that Hall realized that his illness wasn't going to go away. His business was floundering. In May he placed a sale ad in *Billboard* that offered everything from elephants, bears, camels, and wagons to tents, seating, show equipment, and railroad cars.

In June, Langdon and his wife contacted the newspaper to provide a change of address. They had lived in Chicago the previous two years but were moving to Atlanta. Mrs. Langdon was the former Leona Crump, originally from Lancaster.

While resting in his bed on the second floor of the family home, Hall passed away on June 30. He was survived by his wife, Sarah Elizabeth; his two daughters, Sydney and Wilma; his son, Bill Hall Jr.; and his sister, Donah Dobin from Chicago. Hall was laid to rest in the I.O.O.F. Cemetery in Lancaster.

Hall operated horse and mule sales barns in Duluth, Minnesota; Richmond, Virginia; Lancaster, Missouri; London; Cape Town; and Hamburg. He truly had been the "Horse King of the World" for nearly thirty years. He was a horse trader for over fifty years. In his lifetime, Hall purchased fourteen circuses and repossessed a few more. The elephants that he loved so dearly came and went over the years. At least 109 different elephants spent time on Hall's farm.

While death had taken Hall away from a failing enterprise, the family was left with the aftermath. Hall died penniless. While he had very little money, he had plenty of assets, including hundreds of acres of land in a couple different states, railroad cars, circus wagons and equipment, plenty of horses and hoof stock, wild animals, elephants, and various properties and buildings around town. The Schuyler County Bank agreed to take the elephants as collateral for some of Hall's loans. After Hall passed, Jimmy Hamiter came to Lancaster and bought Vera.

McClain remained with the Hall operation and kept things moving for the benefit of the Hall family. He was joined by Hall Jr. who had grown up around horses and had learned the business from his father. McClain and Hall Jr. continued to buy horses in September. There were spot dates during the summer that the elephants filled. Huntley and Stretch took two camels and two elephants to Chicago for ten days at the end of August.

In the first week of September, Wilma Hall departed for La Plata to teach. The Hall Farm provided two elephant acts with three elephants in each group for the town's fall celebration. Huntley, his wife, and their three elephants, Wilma, Sydney, and Mary, performed at the festival. Welsh offered up Tommie, Ding, and Boo for the celebration as well. The two groups were the sensation of the festival.¹⁰⁰

Dill wrote to Sadie Hall in December from his Dallas winter quarters to assure her the elephants he leased were being well taken care of in a nice warm place. Generally those parties who leased animals from Hall promptly returned them once they stopped generating an income to avoid the expenses of housing them all winter.

There wasn't much to talk about the rest of the year except for the return of the previously leased elephants for the winter months. Circus trading had stopped and the horse market had slowed way down. The Depression was slowly taking its toll. The best the Hall family could do was to keep the animals alive through the winter.

THE FINAL YEARS 1933

With very little income coming in, the Hall family slipped into a position it had never experienced before. Instead of having the world at their disposal, they were now finding it taken away from them. Sadie Hall's brother, Frank, passed away in the middle of January after he had emergency surgery due to a gall bladder infection.

Charles Hatch contracted for the use of the ASAW elephant act for eight days in February in California. On February 13, Sadie Hall sold three mules to the Hall Company. The check was signed as the Hall Company with Hall Jr. as the co-signor.

Sadie Hall was the executor of the Hall estate. The court probated the will on March 6. There are a few cancelled checks remaining in the Hall Papers from 1933. All are signed as the Hall Company with either McClain or Hall Jr. as a second signer. The checks indicate that horses were still being bought and sold. The checks end in March. It is uncertain if the horse business was productive the rest of the year.

The Hall Company made out a check for \$2000 payable to the Schuyler County Bank. It is typed below the dollar amount, "account check returned, unable to meet the Bank Moratorium." This lead to much worse proceedings in 1934.

Sadie Hall continued making contracts to lease the elephants. She was able to sell Sadie and Elsie to the Russell Bros. Circus. Ena and Mabel were sold to Bud Anderson's Seal Bros. Circus. Columbia, who had been at the Hall farm since 1923, died there in 1933.

A contract was executed in October for the use of the elephant military act, and a camel and howdah with Coney Holmes of Associated Attractions in Chicago for seven days in November.

1934

Sadie Hall continued to keep her animal acts working as much as possible. Stretch, Huntley, and the Woodcocks returned to Lancaster on January 20 after having taken six elephants on the road for dates in Omaha. Sadie Hall signed a contract on February 2 with International Bazaars to use five camels for five weeks.

The newspapers announced the next session of Probate Court would be held beginning March 5th. The first name of the agenda was the "W. P. Hall estate, Mrs. Sadie E. Hall, Administrator, Annual Settlement." At this point the historical trail is hard to follow. We know Hall put up his elephants as collateral with the bank be-

cause it was the bank that sold the elephants to the Cole Bros. Circus in 1935. What we don't know is when this happened, and how much the Halls owed the bank. The bank sold the remaining railroad cars in 1935 which as this all develops will lead me to believe that all the income from sales of stock, equipment and railroad cars went to the bank to help satisfy this note. Unfortunately, surviving documentation sheds no light on the details.

On April 5, the Moulton, Iowa newspaper published an article that mentioned that McClain and Hall Jr. shipped two carloads of horses to Pennsylvania. While the automobile had taken over, there was still a need for horses. Stretch and Birney Houston left April 1 with three of the Hall elephants for a month's work around Denver.



In December 1934, the Cole Bros. Circus purchased fifteen railroad cars from the Hall estate, including six flats worth of wagons. All of it had been last used on the Robbins Bros. Circus in 1931. Two of the flat cars are shown here loaded for shipment to Rochester, Indiana. Bill Woodcock photo.

The Woodcocks left with six elephants on April 5 for St. Louis for an extended period of time.

Jess Adkins came to the farm and bought three elephants, Tommie, Ding, and Boo, to use at the Chicago World's Fair. Huntley accompanied them to Peru, Indiana where he worked with the elephants and a new presenter to prepare them for their debut. He returned to Lancaster after that was all taken care of.

The first week of June, Stretch and Birney Houston took three elephants to work for three weeks. Margaret, a female Asian elephant, was sold to the Russell Bros. Circus. Mona was sold to Bud Anderson's Seal Bros. Circus.

In September the Hall family was unable to meet the demands of the bank. A trustee's sale was held on Saturday, September 7. Much of the Hall-owned real estate was offered for sale. An eighteen acre tract of land west of the I. O. O. F. Cemetery was sold to Web M. Farrell for the Odd Fellows Lodge for \$1775. The horse and circus barns was sold to the Hall heirs for \$2000. Hall Jr. purchased a home south of the Hall residence for \$525 and the Keller property for \$500. The old Lancaster Hotel, which had been a home to many of the Hall employees over the years, was sold to R.L. Burkland for \$375. Burkland was one of the bank cashiers. Hall Jr. also bought the horse barn south of the jail for \$150.¹⁰¹

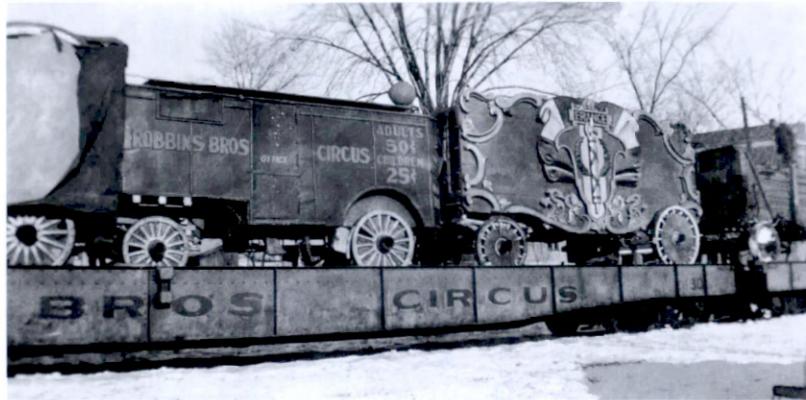
The checks found in the Hall Papers provide evidence that some horse and mule trading continued in 1934. There were a few purchases made between October 18 and 20, but rarely was there more than one check a day. This indicates the horse sales were not significant for the Hall operations anymore.

Welsh was requested for a lease of twenty ponies and harness for a large Santa Claus production in New York City that started November 24. D. Earl Combs was familiar with Welsh and told Sadie Hall he would keep him working on the winter circus dates

that were still being booked. They signed a new contract for the animals then.

More legal notices came in December 1934. A trustee's sale was being planned for Monday, January 7, 1935 to offer a parcel of land that had principal and interest due on it from a note that was signed on June 6, 1919 by William and Sadie Hall. A second legal notice appeared the same day for another parcel of land that was tied to a note signed December 18, 1931 by the Halls. This land was being sold for interest and principal due on the note and for unpaid property taxes. The legal description of the property offered for sale concludes with "all 1143.19 acres are in Schuyler County."¹⁰²

Zack Terrell and Adkins came to Lancaster to meet Sadie Hall, Hall Jr., and McClain. Terrell and Adkins wanted to put a show on the road. Both men had extensive experience in the circus world, especially in management. By the time they got ready to depart the Hall Farm, they had purchased, fifteen railroad cars, wagons, equipment, and more animals.¹⁰³ This was one of the most lucrative sales for the Hall estate. The equipment was from Fred Buchanan's



Close up of loaded flatcar showing the Robbins Bros. ticket wagon and France tableau wagon. Bill Woodcock photo.

Robbins Bros. Circus that had been sitting idle at the Hall Farm for almost three years. Included in the purchase were five all-steel Mount Vernon flatcars, two stock cars, an elephant car, and seven coaches, of which five were sleepers, one an advance car, and the last an observation car, the *Rover*.¹⁰⁴ Other parade wagons involved in the sale included the Russia, France, Great Britain, Belgium, and United States bandwagons. Also included were six elephants, Blanche, Katie, Babe, Juno, Tony, and Big Jenny. This left thirteen elephants at the Hall barns for the winter.

1935

While there was still plenty of circus equipment and animals at the Hall farm, the Depression was slowly taking its toll. The horse and mule business was the Halls' main source of income for nearly forty years. However, its future looked bleak, due to mechanization throughout the country.

In March, Fred Winkleman, Bellamy Seals, John Westmont, and James Marshall came down from Madison, Wisconsin to purchase some animals. A newspaper article states that they bought a pony to be a companion for an elephant, Annie. In 1918, Hall gave Annie to the Henry Vilas Zoo in Milwaukee. They also agreed to purchase a male camel, a pregnant female camel, and her calf from the previous year. Woodcock drove them up to Wisconsin in an elephant truck that normally hauled six elephants. After the animals were safely delivered, the men agreed to buy five more ponies from Sadie Hall.

In February good news arrived at the Hall Farm. William and

Babe Woodcock, both employed by the Hall estate, gave birth to a son. Born February 26, 1935, their newborn son would grow up to become the legendary elephant trainer and historian, William "Buckles" Woodcock, Jr.

The 1935 season of the newly formed Cole Bros. Circus started off well. The show made money quickly because it was blessed with two big name stars, Clyde Beatty and Ken Maynard, and was run by men with great experience, Terrell and Adkins. In the middle of the season, they returned to the Hall Farm to look over what was still on the grounds. They bought more equipment from Sadie Hall but more importantly, they bought nine of the remaining thirteen elephants at the farm, purchasing George, Mary, Sidney, Wilma, Nellie, Tessie, Anna May, Little Katie, and Little Jenny.

On June 13 the *Lancaster Excelsior* published a small article about the last of the Hall circus and carnival train cars being taken away from Lancaster. Burkland, who worked for the Schuyler County Bank, sold two of the coaches to Lizzie Sommers. She moved them to the vacant lot south of her property and made them into tourist cabins. The remaining train cars were all sold to Rosenbaum in Centerville, Iowa.

Word arrived in the *Lancaster Excelsior*, now combined with the *Schuyler County Republican*, in early September that Paul Johanning had died in Sacramento on August 26. Johanning was one of Hall's employees for many years. He was a lion trainer and later went on to great stardom on other shows. He owned his own wild animal show for a while. During his stay in the Lancaster area, he became a Mason. At the time of his death, he had no surviving relatives.

A remaining elephant named Virginia was sold to Woodcock. At the end of the 1935 season, Terrell and Adkins returned to purchase the last three remaining elephants, Major, Trilby, and Alice. This marked the end of the elephant business in Lancaster. Terrell and Adkins also purchased what they felt was the last worthwhile show equipment.¹⁰⁵ Some of the more notable wagons included in this purchase were the three allegorical floats built in the 1880s for the Barnum and London show. They were the Old Woman in the Shoe, Cinderella, and the Mother Goose, all now at the Circus World Museum. By the end of 1935, a few wagons and few head of livestock still remained at the Hall Farm.

Epilogue

While the Hall circus days were over and the horse business was waning, life went on. Wilma Hall died unexpectedly on April 6, 1938. She taught in various schools but never married. Hall Jr. did all he could after his father's passing to gain much of the family wealth back. He had much success, although by that time most of the land holdings had been sold at various auctions. The matriarch of the family, Sarah Elizabeth "Sadie" Hall passed away on August 6, 1957. She lived through a fantastic part of America's history in a lifestyle very few experienced. She was survived by her daughter, Sydney; her son, Bill Hall Jr.; two grandchildren, William and Sara Bunch; her son-in-law, William Bunch; one brother, Dr. G.H. Mitchell; and one sister, Mrs. C. L. Starrett.

Hall's right hand man for nearly forty years, Bert McClain, died August 9, 1954 at the age of eighty-one. McClain had suffered from diabetes, which caused him to lose a leg. Hall Jr. carried on the horse business for a few more years the best he could. The market and demand wasn't the same anymore. He was employed by the State of Missouri Department of Transportation in his later years. Hall Jr. never married either. He passed away on May 1, 1969.¹⁰⁶



In December 1935 the Cole Bros. Circus returned to the Hall Farm to purchase almost all the remaining usable equipment and the last three elephants. Shown here are Major and the old Mother Goose pony float, probably on the day they left Lancaster. Cole also acquired two other pony floats and the remnants of the Buck Jones Wild West show. Major got frisky in the Cole show's Rochester, Indiana winter quarters and had to be put down in February 1936. Pfening Archives.

The only surviving daughter, Sydney Elizabeth Hall married William Franklin Bunch in 1933. They had two children William and Sarah. Sadly, Hall's only grandchildren were born after his death. Sydney Bunch contacted the Circus World Museum in 1970, after her brother had passed away, to ask if they would come and look at the family home and see if there was anything they wanted. Chappie Fox and Tom and Robert Parkinson went through the home. They accumulated hundreds of letters written to Hall from various circus owners, carnivals, and horse people. Contracts and cancelled checks were found as well as the records from the Great William P. Hall Shows. They also took heralds and other artifacts, such as an elephant blanket. A number of photos were found; many captured the mining industry. The Circus World Museum also collected costumes, martingales, studded harness with the "H" on the blinders, and other circus equipment.¹⁰⁷

The Hall family residence which had stood intact and undisturbed for a couple years was then sold with the contents to Herman Roberts in 1970. A little over a year later, Roberts offered the home to the newly formed Schuyler County Historical Society. They purchased it and became the new owners of the historic Hall home. It is now the permanent museum for the Schuyler County Historical Society. It has been designated a national historic site. It is open to the public during the summer months and displays many photos of the family and the farm, as well as life in general in Schuyler County, Missouri.

On August 10, 1974, a major fundraising auction was held at the Hall home. The auction was very well received. While plenty of items were offered for sale and the proceeds were great, those in attendance were even greater. Attending this great event was Sydney Hall Bunch, now seventy-five years old, distinguished political figures from Missouri, the mayor of Lancaster, and the mayor of Cape Town, South Africa, Colonel Camara. Camara had flown in from Cape Town just for this auspicious occasion.¹⁰⁸

William Preston Hall, the "Horse King of the World" was inducted into the International Circus Hall of Fame on February 3, 1977.

Sydney Hall Bunch passed away on November 22, 1984. The entire family is buried in the I. O. O. F. Lancaster Cemetery.

Acknowledgements

This has been a very special journey for me. Even as this article was being finished, new information on William P. Hall kept popping up. After three years working on this paper, it's time to let go. The research required extensive travel. I doubt that half this story would have been documented had it not been for the Hall Papers in the Circus World Museum library. My kindest regards go to Erin Foley for her help over the years. Thanks to Jim and Shirley Kieffer for their friendship, hospitality, and all the hours Jim volunteered making copies at Circus World. Rob Richards of the Circus World Museum staff was also a great help.

The Special Collections department at Milner Library at Illinois State University is a treasure to behold. I have been especially graced with amazing discoveries and help from Maureen Brundale and Mark Schmitt. They have found many details we would have never known of had they not scoured around in their collection, particularly the Ringling Bros. archives that came to Illinois State as part of the Sverre Braathen collection.

My hat goes off to Marilyn Foreman and the entire Schuyler County Historical Society for the amazing experience of being able to walk through Hall's home under Marilyn's guidance, and to look at the records they have preserved.

Fred Pfening III graciously shared his William P. Hall letters and other documentation with me. The late Fred D. Pfening, Jr. was always a source of encouragement and made available photos from the Pfening Archives anytime I asked.

Saving the best for last, I have been incredibly fortunate and humbled to be a student of one of the greatest circus historians I have ever known. Fred Dahlinger, Jr. has offered his insights and direction, often pushing me to examine material that I would never have otherwise thought about exploring. His expert advice, questions, and answers have been a huge asset to this paper. There aren't enough words to express my gratitude to such a gentleman.

There were several transactions I couldn't analyze in detail for lack of documentation. On the other hand, I found information in cash ledgers and sales slips that I never imagined still existed. It is my hope that you, my fellow circus historians, have enjoyed this journey through time with a man who had no peer in the circus business. Perhaps if nothing else, we have more evidence of his life story in one place now. **BW**

By 1954 when circus fan Jay Beardsley took this photo, the former Yankee Robinson car used as an office, had been moved away from the road and was being used as a chicken coop. Pfening Archives.



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7. *Lancaster Excelsior*, March 12, 1915.
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10. *New York Clipper*, April 10, 1915, p. 9.
11. *Lancaster Excelsior*, April 30, 1915.
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13. Original letter in Hall Papers, CWM.
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15. *Billboard*, September 11, 1915, p. 22.
16. *Billboard*, November 20, 1915, p. 22.
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The gravestone of "The Horse King of the World" at the I.O.O.F. Cemetery in Lancaster, Missouri. Author's photo.



A Lifetime of Memories

by Jim Foster

This article was written from notes from a letter and phone conversation with Bernie Bolstad. Soon after this piece was written Bolstad passed away in Jacksonville Beach, Florida on September 10, 2010 at the age of 81.

Young Bernie was sad . . . and also surprised. It was right after Labor Day 1946 and time for him to leave his summer job on the circus, drop off the train, in the circus vernacular, and go back to Minnesota to finish high school.

Dailey Bros. Circus was in Iowa that day. After the evening performance, as usual, it would strike its big top, pack its trunks, load the animals and move off in the night, continuing its seemingly never-ending crawl across the country, one city and one day at a time. Dailey Bros. was a railroad shows, a distinction that put it above the majority of shows that still traveled by truck. "I was exhausted. It was hard work and long days. But I hated to leave," Bernie recalls.

"Before I left, though, I was given an elephant hook. Either Smokey Jones or Rex Williams gave it to me. I can't remember which. Both were very young but became legendary elephant trainers. Today, to be politically correct, they call it an elephant 'guide.' But it was a hook like those used over the ages by elephant handlers everywhere. This one was home-forged by Louie Reed. Louie was menagerie superintendent on the show. He went to India to bring back animals. Anyway, either Smokey or Rex gave it to me. I don't know why. They just must have thought I was okay."

The elephant hook is a serious instrument. The handle, fashioned from a sawed-off oak ax handle, is smooth as silk and hard as iron. The hook or prod is of rough steel and fits secure in an eight inch slot. It's held tight by two steel rivets, their heads pounded round to match the curve of the handle. A light ridge on the reverse end, made to accommodate the head of an ax, ensures a good grip. And it is heavy.

"Speaking of Louie Reed," Bernie says, the memories flooding back, "I got in real trouble with him once. He had a big menagerie. He even had a couple of polar bears. But, anyway, he had one of those purple-faced mandrills, like a big baboon. They're a fiend-

ish creature in temperament as well as appearance. I worked the midway grease joint, and I used to go into the menagerie tent and feed that thing day-old cinnamon rolls. Well, that rascal would hold back so I'd come closer to its cage and then it would reach out real quick and try to grab my hand. They're very strong, and possibly if it'd gotten a good hold it might have killed me. Well, Louie caught me at it one day and he gave me heck. He was mad. He said if I wouldn't sell those day-old rolls to people, why should I expect one of his animals to eat them."

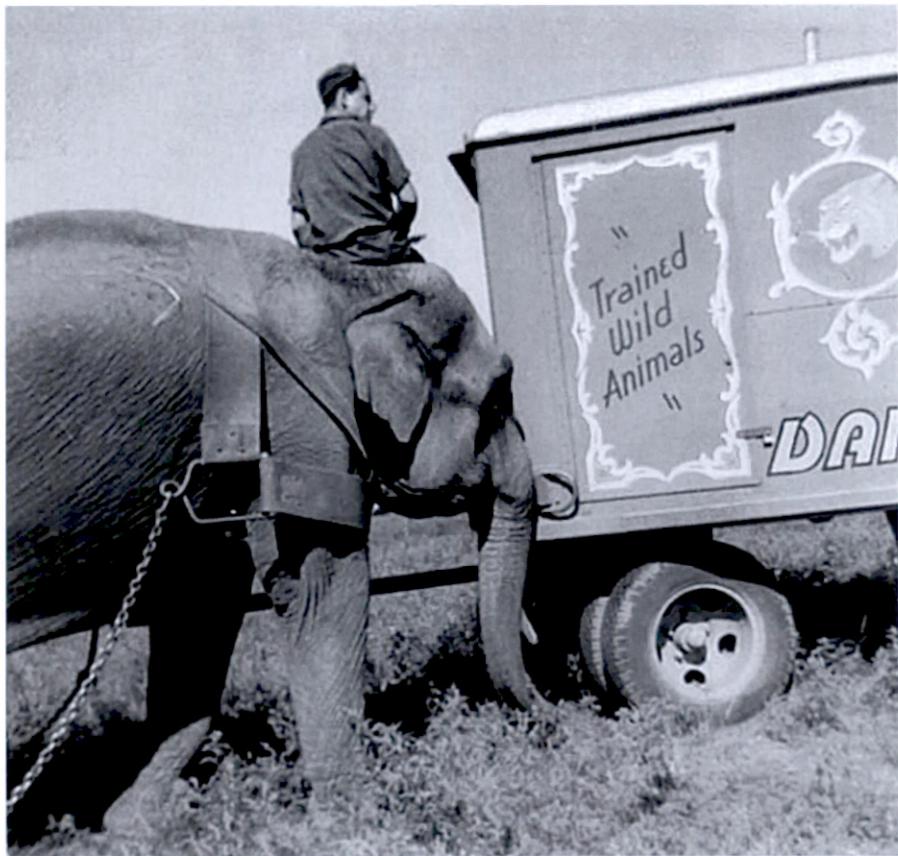
When Bernie joined up that summer, he was assigned to what was formally called the midway diner. He was an apprentice, which meant his wages were less than some of the others. "We were a typical grease joint, coffee, a gas-fired griddle and some vile colored water [pink lemonade?]. . . . I don't know if we even put ice in it. We were spotted right across from the sideshow. Ward Hall was on the bally platform, and did magic, vent [ventriloquism] and ate fire inside. I think this was Ward's first year on the circus. He was only 16 at the time. But he cut an impressive figure in a white suit with gold piping and gold-fringed epaulets. Ward would go on to become a great sideshow entrepreneur. The sideshow manager was Milt Robbins, a circus veteran and legend.



Bernie Bolstad, age 17, in front of the supply wagon on Dailey Bros. in 1946. All photos from Bernie Bolstad.

"My boss, the diner's manager, was George Hunt, I believe." As on all circuses each joint operator worked on a percentage, and many of them also engaged in a bit of graft. Bernie's manager was no exception, and that led to friction. His racket was based on the fact that the only count on drinks the office had was to match the allotted number of cups against money turned in. "Well, my boss wanted me to go out and gather up waxed Dixie cups that had been discarded along the midway so he could rinse them, refill them and sell them again. By refilling used cups the manager could make extra sales and pocket the money. Well, I refused. My refusal was more than a normal concern for sanitation. There was a severe polio outbreak that summer. I didn't figure out until later that he was rehashing the cups to enhance his income." Fate would stop in to solve Bernie's immediate dilemma, but present another.

"It was just after Valley City, North Dakota," Bernie remembers



Smokey Jones, age 19, on bull spotting a wagon on Dailey in 1946.

with that uncanny knack showmen have for recalling specific places and dates, "and the grease joint manager had missed the train." It was August 6. Missing the train was grounds for dismissal. "Well, I think it was the show owner Ben Davenport himself who came up to me and asked, 'Do you think you can run this thing?' I said 'sure' and I became the grease joint manager. I worked very hard. And I doubled the gross," he adds proudly.

Because you gave them an honest count?

"Yep. And I ended up making \$35 a week plus my percentage."

One of the perks Bernie inherited on becoming manager of the midway diner was the friendship of one of the showgirls. "Let me see. Her name was . . . perhaps I shouldn't identify her. She might still be alive, although she'd have to be 95 to 100 years old. Maybe she became a nun," Bernie adds without conviction. "Anyway, she was a Texas cowgirl in the show. Now the way it worked, everyone on the train shared a bunk," Bernie continues, choosing his words carefully, "so it would seem logical that I would take his place. And she was willing." Bernie pauses, smiles, then jolts himself back to the story. "Heck, she was almost twice my age."

She had the hots for you?

Quick chuckle. "I guess you could say that."

"Well, I'd heard plenty of stories from soldiers coming home from the war about this sort of thing so I decided this wasn't for me. (My, how I dreamed about that opportunity lost a few years later when I was a student at the University of Minnesota.) I decided the safest place for me was to move to the grease joint. It was wagon 32. At night it was loaded on a flatcar, and although it was secured by chains and on the sides and the wheels were

chocked, it swayed a lot side to side, sometimes violently in a strong wind. I had about a two-inch-thick pad on a steel storage shelf. It was four or five feet off the floor. I don't think I slept a wink for a couple of nights, but after that I was so tired I slept quite well."

As for the showgirl, she must not have held a grudge. In addition to the elephant hook, the day Bernie left the show she approached him and gave him a riding quirt, a type of riding crop she used in the show. Its patterned red and brown leather strapping is worn smooth, but, unlike the hook, the rawhide lash appears barely used.

After a professional career as a field director with the Red Cross, Bernie traveled back to his original love, outdoor show business. For five years he was a man of all trades, including one season doing some booking on Franzen Bros. Circus, and later had his own kiddie spin-the-arrow game board that he set up at carnivals and fairs as much for pleasure as for profit. "Every Child Wins a Prize!"

Bernie's love for outdoor show business dates from even before his circus days. When he was a boy of 12, his parents allowed him to travel to the Pacific Northwest to work on his Uncle Charlie's Ziegler Shows, a carnival of some renown.

Now, at 81 years of age and dealing with health problems, Bernie Bolstad has been sorting through those memories and keepsakes that he's treasured all these years. There are the hook and quirt, of course, and many more things. And a stack of black-and-white pictures he'd snapped with his \$2 Brownie. **BW**

The cowgirl-showgirl from Quanah, Texas, Bolstad's friend on the show.



Bernie Bolstad Remembers: 17-year-old Learned Ways of the World Fast on Dailey Bros. Grease Joint Job

The summer of 1946 was a defining moment in my show business career. In 1941 and 1944 I had spent the summer on my Uncle Charlie Ziegler's carnival in Washington state. Although Charlie and Aunt Bess weren't too restrictive, I felt that at the ripe old age of 17 it was finally time to be on my own. So as soon as my high school junior year ended in 1946, I got a job with the William T. Collins shows, which was a major carnival in the Midwest. Mr. Collins later was one of the founders of the Outdoor Amusement Business Association. On the show I was a ticket seller and also helped set up and tear down rides. It was a tough job as we were playing two fairs a week in North Dakota with long jumps.



Bernie Bolstad in front of his grease joint on the Dailey Bros. midway in 1946. All photos from Bernie Bolstad.

Business was good, and we would usually open in the forenoon and stay open until after midnight. One of the busiest days was the Fourth of July at the Stutsman County Fair in Jamestown, North Dakota. We opened at 9:30 a.m., and I sold 4,150 tickets at 25 cents each on the twin Ferris wheels. It was after 2:00 a.m. when I crawled into a cab of a truck and went to sleep.

I finally had had enough of carnival life for that season and blew the show at Hamilton, North Dakota. My plan was to hitchhike to Hallock, Minnesota, and get a job with the Bell Bros. Circus band. I thought I was a pretty good trombone player. The matinee was in progress in Hallock. During intermission I walked up to the little

four-piece band and announced my arrival. Well, the leader handed me his trombone and pointed at the music for the coming number. He picked up another horn, so now the band had five pieces. The music was hand-written and unintelligible to me. Not only that, but they started playing a gallop! Needless to say I didn't play a note. I have had the utmost respect for professional musicians ever since.

I left Hallock immediately, hitchhiking to Crookston, Minnesota, to implement Plan B: a possible job, but not in the band, with Dailey Bros. Circus. It was July 20th. The evening show was on, and I stopped at the midway diner for a hot dog. I hadn't eaten since breakfast. I also asked if there were any jobs available.

The diner manager, George Hunt, told me that his helper had quit that day and I could go to work at the diner. He also told me that I could sleep in the diner, as conditions on the sleeping cars were very crowded. I was told to show up at the diner after it was loaded on the train that night.

Finding the train and wagon 32 (the diner) in the rather large dark rail yard was not easy. The coaches, stock cars and 72-foot flats making up the 20-car train must have stretched out for at least a third of a mile. Finally, I found it. I climbed up on the gunnels of the flat car. As I reached up to open the door of wagon 32, I felt the sting of a bullwhip wrapped around my thighs. An employee of the animal department was moving some lead stock to their stock car when he spotted me, and thinking I was trying to break into the wagon, nailed me with his whip. I yelled out, "Hey, I'm with it," hoping that carnie lingo was also used on circuses. The whip-bearer went on with his charges, so apparently he understood, or didn't have time to pursue the matter any further. I was already plenty nervous and scared, and this experience wasn't exactly the welcome wagon. But there I was, joining a real circus!

In 1946 most trains still moved behind steam locomotives. That meant lots of soot and clinkers would get inside wagon 32, "my" grease joint, around the loosely-fitted panels on the sides and on the back end. These panels swung upward to serve as an awning against the sun. The shade was nice, but they let in a lot of wind and grit during our moves. So lots of cleaning was necessary most mornings to make ready for business. The few times diesel locomotives moved the train, it was a treat.

Train starts and stops usually were jolting. Early one morning in the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, yards the train made an unusually abrupt braking, which caused my head to hit the steel bulkhead of the wagon. A metal bucket flew from one end of the wagon to the other, probably 20 feet. I awoke from a deep sleep sure that there had been a train wreck, but promptly went back to dreamland. I even forgot the incident but was reminded of it when I got to the lot



A poler unloads wagon 100 from the Dailey train in 1946. Note crowd watching the spectacle.

and heard folks talking about it.

There were several Sunday runs while I was on the show. One Sunday I rode on top of the wagon, which was quite thrilling. During an interim stop one of my friends walked from the sleepers to wagon 32. When the train started moving again I made some steak sandwiches for us. I have mentioned this to Ward Hall, thinking he was the one who joined me for that fine steak snack, but he had no recollection of it. He has a wonderful memory, so it must have been someone else. By the way, it was routine for some of the working men to sleep under wagons on the flats during good weather. Even if the weather wasn't so nice the open air was better than sharing a bunk with a louse-ridden or drunk fellow in the stale, smelly bunk car.

Speaking of Ward Hall, I was reminiscing with him about the layover of the circus in Mobridge, South Dakota. We played Miles City, Montana on Sunday, August 11. We were suppose to play Lemmon, South Dakota the next day, but the town was quarantined because of the polio epidemic. We so made a 312-mile jump from Miles City to Mobridge, getting in about 5:00 p. m Monday. The circus didn't set up that night. That evening a few of us went into town and took in a movie. Ward remembers the occasion because the newsreel that night was an exposé of crooked gambling on outdoor shows. This made us all feel a bit insecure later. Although most of us were teenagers, we did stop for a few beers after the movie before walking back to the lot. I had never seen the circus in the mode it was in. Loaded wagons were scattered about the dark lot. No tents. I was walking beside a cage wagon when I saw a huge animal slinking toward me. I froze

in my tracks. There was no refuge. My fear eased when the critter wagged its tail. It was the Great Dane on the show and, fortunately, he was friendly to me.

At the grease joint I had an ancillary duty. Eva Davenport, circus owner Ben's wife, would bring several cartons of cigarettes each morning that I was to sell to show people at 25 cents a pack. She also provided a fishing tackle box loaded with "Mickeys," which were two-ounce medicine bottles of whiskey to be sold for 50 cents and four-ounce bottles to be sold for \$1. Four ounces of gin cost only 80 cents. I would hand these items out the back door of the wagon, always wrapped in a napkin, to the thirsty show folks. This illegal business never got me in any trouble, but it is fair to say I never put it on a resume in later life either.

When we played Morris, Minnesota on August 4 both my parents arrived before the evening show. My hometown was only about 33 miles away. Just prior to their arrival, Deep Sea Red, a minor member of the "Games" department, came up to the diner in a rage. He claimed he had purchased a Mickey earlier that was not completely full. This further angered his already-drunken state. His language was vile just as my parents walked up. I was terribly embarrassed, but I think my parents were so excited to see me that they didn't even hear Deep Sea Red's assessment of me. Ben Davenport treated my parents royally. They were given a complete tour of the menagerie and horse top and then given great seats at the performance. Ben was very proud of his animals, especially the horses. My dad was a longtime veterinarian specializing in large animals, and he appreciated the great shape of

The sideshow bally seen from the midway diner. Milt Robbins is doing the pitch. To his right are snake charmer Martha Ali, the anatomical wonder Americo and a very young Ward Hall. Americo could suck in his stomach so far you could see his spine.



the animals as well as the diversity.

One night during teardown one of the elephant men was enjoying a cup of coffee at the front of my grease joint. As you can't exactly put a leash on an elephant, the beast wandered around to the back of the wagon and squeezed her head through the door, pulling out a big cardboard box from under my bunk. She ingested the box and its contents, ten individually wrapped packages, each containing a dozen buns, paper, staples and all. Swatting the elephant with a broom had no effect at all. Close to 40 years later, Smokey Jones told me that X-rays of elephants' stomachs often revealed lots of metal objects such as bailing wire, and they had remained completely healthy.

One forenoon a bakery deliveryman brought to the diner a supply of fresh bakery goods for which I paid \$14. Fourteen dollars in 1946 would be about \$150 some 64 years later. The guy was friendly, and we had a short chat before he departed. Not too long afterward he returned, sheepishly admitting that some of the "Lucky Boys" on the show had gotten him in what he thought was a game of chance. Not only had they relieved him of the \$14 I had paid him but a whole lot more. That made me feel bad, but of course I didn't dare tell him he had essentially been skillfully robbed. I was left with the feeling that he would never go on to become a circus fan!

Like on every circus throughout history, almost everybody on Dailey Bros. had extra duties beyond their primary job. The grifters had to erect and tear down the sideshow banner line. Before my promotion to grease joint manager, I had to help roll the big top canvas and load the big top center poles. Both were hard work, especially when the weather was wet. Late one night, seven or eight of us were trying to roll a huge section of canvas. I was leaning into

Big crowd awaiting "Doors." Keokuk, Iowa, September 2.



The train just in. Some wagons are still chained to the flat cars.

the bale as hard as I could but had to stop for a second to get better footing. The bale stopped moving. Strange. Then I wised up. Apparently, I was one of only a few exerting any energy. The rest were just leaning. Center poles were the worst. At six feet, three inches, I was taller than the other dozen or so lifters so there was more pressure on my shoulder. Getting promoted to grease joint manager sure had its fringe benefits.

During the 1946 season Norma Davenport, daughter of show owners Ben and Eva Davenport, was advertised as the "world's youngest Elephant Trainer at Age 12." she actually was 15, but the posters and ads hadn't caught up with her, and the program was not updated for a number of years. Even at 15 she was still possibly the world's youngest elephant trainer. Norma also was one of the hardest-working persons on the show. She was in the spec, presented elephants and horses, and was an aerialist. I'm sure she had additional duties when not performing.

I had few opportunities to speak to her as I was close to the bottom of the social hierarchy and was considered a "First of May." During our rare encounters on the lot during setup she often would send me back to the grease joint to bring her some cigarettes. She always paid the 25 cents per pack in advance. About 40 years later, Norma was in our town of Jacksonville Beach, Florida, as concession manager of an indoor show. I introduced myself and she was very cordial, although I'm sure she didn't remember me. I invited her out to our house after the evening performance to meet my wife Inga, and have some coffee. As we visited, our cat came in from outdoors proudly carrying a mouse and laid it at Norma's feet. Norma screamed and appeared ready to climb on a chair. Now here was a lady who for years had worked elephants in the ring, and here she was cowering from a mouse. Perhaps the legendary fear of mice that elephants are supposed to have applies to their trainers, too. **BW**

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